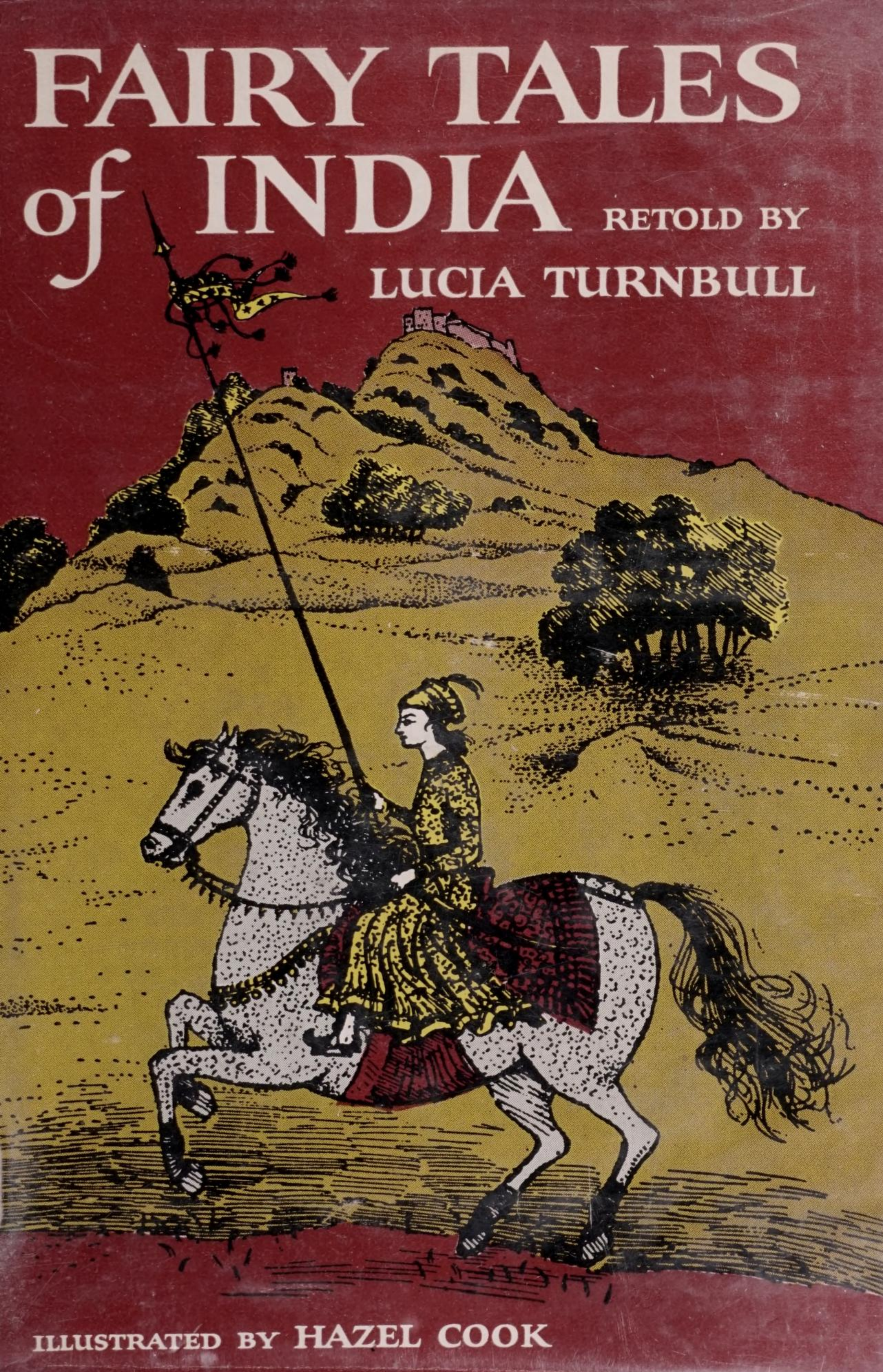
FAIRY TALES of INDIA

RETOLD BY

LUCIA TURNBULL



ILLUSTRATED BY HAZEL COOK

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

FAIRY TALES of INDIA

Retold by
LUCIA TURNBULL

Illustrated by
HAZEL COOK

From the enchanted world of India—the India of many, many years ago—comes a glittering collection of fairy tales, as old and as new as the very language of wisdom.

Hindu myths and legends, full-grown before the dawn of history, were primarily responsible for giving us the Fable, or Animal-tale. And animals there are in plenitude here: the Stone Monkey, who is given a lesson in humility; the Crocodile, who suffers terribly from greed; and the Hare, who knew the true meaning of love —all of them speak, amuse, and instruct. There are Princes, too, and Princesses, and, since it is India, Rajahs and Buddhas. Who is "The Boy with the Moon on His Forehead"? How did King Yudhishthira come to the Gates of Heaven with his dog? And what happened to the Jackal at "A School for Crocodiles"?

But while these tales are Indian, they are also international. For many of our most beloved stories are rooted in this ancient

Continued on back flap

VERMONT
RARY SERVICE
ollection

FAIRY TALES OF INDIA

FAIRY TALES OF INDIA

RETOLD BY

LUCIA TURNBULL

Illustrated by Hazel Cook

CRITERION BOOKS, NEW YORK

Copyright © Frederick Muller Ltd. 1959

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 60-6266

This book was originally published in England
by Frederick Muller, Ltd. under the title
Indian Fairy Tales.

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

J398

CONTENTS

	PAGE
The Stone Monkey	I
The Princess of the Mountain	12
The Crab, the Crocodile and the Jackal	27
The Two Sisters	33
The Wild Geese and the Tortoise	45
The Boy with the Moon on His Forehead	50
The Lizard's Tail	84
The False Fakir	91
The Mouse's Bride	103
A School for Crocodiles	110
The Judgement of the Shepherd	117
The Mouse and the Wizard	127
The Beetle and a Drop of Honey	136
The Hare in the Moon	151
Sindhu	158
How King Yudhishthira Came to the Gates of Heaven with His Dog	168

63 6042

INTRODUCTION

India, that vast treasure-house of story, has probably contributed more to the folk-tales of the world than any other country, and this is not strange, since before the dawn of history, Hindu myth and legend (as enshrined in the Mahabharata and the Ramayan) had already attained a full maturity. And as dynasty succeeded dynasty, while civilization waxed and waned with every new invasion from the North, so the form and fact of many stories must have mingled with those heard from the lips of the newcomers: these no doubt arrived with a store of folk-tales of their own. But in spite of this foreign addition to the indigenous growth, there is one form of it which must have had too strong a root in Hindu tradition to admit a graft from any alien stock. This is the Fable or Animal-tale, which must date from before the beginning of our own era, and which centuries of adaptation or imitation could not improve. The entry of the animal kingdom into that of man probably first took place in a world of forest-dwellers, who saw in everything around them objects with a fate, feelings and even language similar to their own. To them the very trees were the abode of spirits, who could cast spells for good or ill. Upon these trees small offerings were hung to put the tree-god into a good humour. And, as with the trees, certain animals, reptiles or birds rose in the estimation of these primitive people, until, like the spirits of the trees, they became endowed with powers worthy of respect and worship.

It is little wonder then, that if members of the animal kingdom could assume divinity they could also speak. Tales in which animals can talk, are by no means singular to India, but in no other folk-lore do they talk so wisely, so wittily or so well. Nor are they so equal to the difficulties of

any situation, or solve such with both aplomb and skill. In the present collection we have only to follow the conversation which takes place between the Crocodile, the Crab and the Jackal, or note the back-chat which passes between the Stone Monkey and his living fellows, to agree that when animals talk in India they are either born entertainers or have become so through the practice of twice a thousand years.

But here there is only room for a few of these gems of traditional humour, for a collection of a country's folk-tales must include those in varied moods. India, although so rich in Myth, Legend and Fable, has no real fairy-lore, as we know it in the West, though supernatural beings abound. And if one could find oneself in an Indian village with a scarlet gul-mohur tree in full bloom, there, squatting in its scant shade, might be an old man, and listening to him with an air of enchantment a group of children, who, if owning little or nothing of this world's goods, are rich in their heritage of story.

A word should be added in explanation of the method which the Collector has employed in the retelling of these tales. It should be remembered that there is no one original or authentic text which can be used as a foundation on which to build—nothing like the text of a printed Shakespeare play or even a manuscript of Homer. Where so many variant versions have found their way into print, the Collector has used her discretion in handling the outline of the story, as well as the idiom in which the tale has been usually narrated. To produce a coherent or a dramatic whole which shall be aesthetically satisfying to the modern reader some omissions from the more or less traditional outlines have been deliberately made. It is hoped that critically-minded readers who scrutinize the result will find that such "liberties" as have been taken have been justified by the artistic effect.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to the following publishers who have permitted copyright or re-arrangement of certain stories which appear in this collection:

To Messrs. Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd. for free use of some titles and the permission to return to narrative some fables which were dramatized for their publication *When Animals Talked* (Heritage of Literature Series, J.9); also "The Story of Sindhu", arranged from *The Ramayana*, for *Tales of Indian Youth*. To The Oxford University Press for the anthology use of "The Beetle and a Drop of Honey", from *The Teacher's Omnibus of Stories*, Book 2. And to The Oxford University Press (Bombay) for "The Princess of the Mountain", from *Golden Wonder Tales*.

Every effort has been made to trace any further source of copyright and it is hoped that none has been unconsciously infringed.

I

The Stone Monkey

LONG, long ago, on a rocky point of a great mountain, there lay a strange stone egg. The warm sun shone upon it until quite suddenly it burst, and from among the fragments leapt a monkey —a monkey of stone.

Then, one of the lesser gods—whose prank this stone monkey was—laughed aloud in his pearly heaven, and endowed the creature with vanity and mischief, counting it a good joke to hatch out of stone something to tease and bewilder man and beast, and even the gods of water, sky and air.

And so the stone monkey skipped about the steep mountain-side, leaping from rock to rock across deep chasms, as never a real monkey had dared to do before.

Then the other monkeys—those that were real—came crowding round, very curious to see this strange thing which was like—and yet so unlike—themselves. And as monkeys do, they gibbered and chattered in the greatest excitement, asking each other questions and replying with others.

"How did he get here ?" asked the first monkey.

"Where has he come from ?" put in another.

"What has he come for ?" said a third; while a

One of the lesser gods laughed aloud in his pearly heaven.

fourth chipped in with, "What on earth are we to do with him ?"

The fifth monkey had an idea. "We haven't a king, have we ?" he said.

"Not since the last one died," replied the sixth monkey, in a tone of mournful respect.

"I consider we ought to have a king," declared the seventh monkey; "I mean, it's not very sensible to have a kingdom and no king."

With this the eighth monkey fully agreed. It was his opinion that folks might well ask, "Who is king of Monkeyland now ?" And when they were told there wasn't one, they would think it very odd.

"So they will," chorused the rest of the monkeys.

"Well, let's ask this stone chap to be our king," suggested the first monkey.

"And you couldn't do better than have me," said the one of stone; "I'll make you a capital king."

"Listen to that now!" exclaimed the second monkey. "He says he'll make us a capital king."

"And he ought to know—about himself, I mean." The third money skipped all round the new arrival as he spoke.

But the fourth monkey wrinkled his nose in doubt. "It seems to me more important that he should know about us, and the sort of king we would like," he said.

"Kings don't bother about that sort of thing much. They say, 'I'm King,' and they just are. The common people get used to them, or if they don't, get rid of them." The fifth monkey ended his speech by adding, "It's quite easy."

"As easy as falling off a log," agreed the sixth

monkey. "Just go up to this stone chap, and say, "Be our King."

"Phew!" whistled the seventh monkey, "and who's to do it ?"

Most of the monkeys fell into a panic—all except the first, who said he was just full of nuts and equal to anything. The rest crowded round him chattering, "Yes, you do it! You do it!" And they settled down to watch.

The first monkey skipped up to where the strange creature of stone was waiting; "Honoured Sir!" he began.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!" cheered the watchers, delighted at this excellent beginning, but the noise put the speaker off.

"Less noise there!" he commanded. "You're making me forget what I was going to say."

And he began again, "Honoured Sir!"

Again all the monkeys cheered vociferously, but the first monkey ordered them sharply to behave. . . . "For this," he said, "is a serious occasion. We do not elect a king every day . . ." and continued his oration.

"Honoured Sir! We, the Monkey people, finding ourselves without a King—our last, His Late Lamented Majesty, having succumbed to an overdose of coconut —we, the Monkey people, do most respectfully request you to fill the vacant kingship."

The Stone Monkey wasted no words: "Delighted, I'm sure. When shall I start being your King ?" he asked airily.

"Whenever, Sir, you feel wise enough," said the first monkey solemnly.

"Now that makes things a bit awkward"; the Stone Monkey looked at all the Monkey people as he spoke, "I must tell you that the god who fashioned me endowed me with almost every gift and accomplishment but left out wisdom. So far I have not missed it, but I see you expect some in your King. I tell you what; suppose now I act as your King for a time and then—if you can spare me—I'll go to the other side of the world and visit a magician I've heard of. It is quite likely that he can supply me with the wisdom I now lack."

All the monkeys agreed that this was a good plan, so when the Stone Monkey had been their King for a year and a day they gave him leave of absence to go in search of the quality of wisdom, which even the King of the Monkeys would need in time.

So he set off down the mountain side with many a leap, skip and bound, and after many days of travel came to the sea. There, seeing a raft on the shore, he stole it and sailed away.

At last he reached the other side of the world, and made his way to the cave where the magician was busy mixing his spells. The Stone Monkey tapped once, twice, and three times on the big stone which was rolled across the mouth of the cave.

"Who's there ?" a wheezy voice asked from inside.

"It is I—the Stone Monkey," was the reply.

"Then roll the stone from the mouth of the cave," instructed the Magician.

The Stone Monkey tried with all his might and main to move the stone, but it did not budge an inch.

"I can't do it," he gasped.

"Then stay where you are," said the Magician calmly.

"But I have come right across the world to ask you for a little wisdom—" began the Stone Monkey.

The Magician laughed out loud, "Then don't chatter so much. Think, for a change," he advised.

But this was not at all what the Stone Monkey wanted.

"Think!" he grumbled, "think! What shall I *think* about ?"

"What does a monkey think about ?" asked the Magician.

"How do I know ? I never thought about what I thought about," replied the Stone Monkey.

"Chatter, chatter, chatter!" mocked the Magician. "Well, just sit where you are in silence, and when I am ready I'll roll the stone away and let you in."

So the Stone Monkey squatted outside the Magician's cave, while the stars came out and went in again. Ages went by, until the Stone Monkey felt sure that the Magician had forgotten all about him, and tapped many times upon the strange door.

"Stop that!" screamed the Magician, in a rage. "Stop, or I'll turn you into a kettle-drum!"

The Stone Monkey made not another sound, and at last the Magician relented and let him in.

And what did the Stone Monkey see ?

A little old man, not more than a span high, wearing a high-pointed hat, and a wide red cloak upon which all kinds of strange signs were embroidered . . . a bat here, a scorpion there, spiders, snakes and lizards—looking uncommonly real and alive.

The Stone Monkey did not take to any of them, nor

much to the Magician, who had a blue face, long teeth, and three eyes—the better to see with. And all the time he was muttering over a little pot hung on black painted sticks over a glowing fire of charcoal.

"Magical Sir!" began the Stone Monkey.

"Heh?" grunted the Magician.

"Magical Sir," continued the Stone Monkey; "I have come across the world to see you."

"So you said before," remarked the Magician. "May I ask what you really came for?"

"To learn a few magic tricks," replied the Stone Monkey.

"Ha ha, you fraud!" chuckled the Magician. "I knew at once you did not really seek wisdom. Well, what sort of tricks shall we begin with?"

The Stone Monkey grew ambitious. "Sir!" he said, "I have been told that you can make yourself invisible—"

There was a blue flash. And no Magician to be seen at all.

"Bless me!" thought the Stone Monkey. "Where *has* the old gentleman gone?"

"I haven't gone," replied the Magician, reappearing, and grinning frightfully. But to show how gifted he was, he disappeared completely again.

"Where are you?" asked the Stone Monkey, mystified; "I can't see you anywhere."

"Of course not!" scoffed the Magician, "I'm invisible." And he popped out of a blue haze, in a great good humour.

"Now let *me* try," begged the Stone Monkey; "but first show me how you did it."

"Well, to begin with, you must have a taste out of

my magic pot," said the Magician, and he took a long horn spoon and dipped it into the mess which was hissing and bubbling over the fire. Then, seizing the Stone Monkey by the nose, he dosed him well.

"Spt-t-t-t-t!" The Stone Monkey tried to spit the spell out. "Spt-t-t-t!" It was no use. He had to swallow it all.

"What horrible stuff! Ugh!" he gurgled.

"If you spit a spell out it doesn't work," warned the Magician, "but I think it all went down. Now! Wish I can't see you."

"I've wished," murmured the Stone Monkey, in a voice which seemed very far away. "Can you see me ?"

"No, thank goodness," replied the Magician. "That's an excellent brew in my pot. Now, come out of nothingness!"

The Stone Monkey did, looking rather crumpled, but vain and greedy as ever.

"Will you do something else for me ?" he asked.

"If you wish not to be heard, I will gladly help you," said the Magician, dropping some yellow powder into the pot.

The Stone Monkey considered his chances, and then disclosed his greatest wish.

"As a matter of fact, I want to fly," he said.

"Well, fly then! Fly as far and as fast as you can from here!" The Magician tapped the Stone Monkey hard on the head with the horn spoon as he spoke.

"Oh, I'm flying! I'm flying! Thank you, Sir, thank you!" cried the Stone Monkey, in glorious surprise. "One thing more, Magical Sir, and I'll be off."

"Anything to be rid of you. What is it ?" snorted the Magician.

"I want to jump farther than any monkey has ever jumped before," said the Stone Monkey.

"Jump away, then!" The Magician gave the Stone Monkey another bang with his spoon as he granted the last wish.

And off leapt the Stone Monkey. Hoop-la! A few thousand miles at every jump, until he jumped right off the earth into the sky where, in his palace, sat the Lord Buddha. The lesser god complained to him: "My Lord Buddha, this is the Stone Monkey whom I fashioned for a joke. How much I regret I ever did so, for there is no end to the creature's pride. Now, having borrowed a little magic from the Magician Tsu-shih, he has—in a few bumptious skips—made the journey from the Chinese Kingdom of Ao-lai, and taken a longer leap right into your heavenly kingdom. In his vanity he has boasted that he now wishes to be Lord of the Sky."

The Buddha nodded. His smile was as wise as it was splendid.

"Tell me more of this," he said gently.

"Already he has done a lot of mischief," continued the lesser god, "for—like other monkeys—he has no sense. I blame myself a little for that, because growing tired of making him, I forgot to endow him with any."

"Where is this Stone Monkey ?" asked the Lord Buddha.

"My Lord, in your Cloud Palace, which he has almost torn to pieces," was the answer.

The Lord Buddha rose majestically from his throne. "Let us go there," was all he said.

And the two went to the Palace of Clouds, where the Stone Monkey had taken up his abode and was insulting everyone and telling them that he was the new master of the sky.

"Who dare meddle with me ? Who dare meddle with me ?" he stormed, and was about to rend a cloud to tiny shreds when he heard a voice which made him tremble.

"Stone Monkey!" said the Lord Buddha; "what do you want ?"

The Stone Monkey cringed, but made his bold request.

"To be Lord of the Sky. I, who was chosen to be King of the Monkeys, am quite fitted for such promotion. See, my Lord Buddha, how I can jump!"

And the Stone Monkey jumped his biggest jump. In a second he was out of sight. In another, back again.

"Can even you do that, my Lord Buddha ?" he asked impudently.

The Lord Buddha smiled again. Really, this creature—with all a monkey's tricks—amused him.

"Stone Monkey," he said, "I will make a wager with you. Come outside the Palace, and stand upon my hand. Then, if you can jump out of my hand, you shall be Lord of the Sky—as you wish to be; but if you cannot jump out of my hand, you shall be sent down to earth and never allowed to come up again."

"Ha, ha ha!" gibbered the Stone Monkey. "Jump out of your hand, my Lord Buddha ? That's very easy for me. I grant you your hand is large. But put it out, and watch. Now I'm on it. One to be ready, two to be steady, and three to be off!"

And gathering his whole strength into his limbs,

the Stone Monkey took his wildest leap, and lo! he was out of sight. Suddenly he saw five great red pillars standing on the edge of space, beyond which there was nothing. And he communed vain-gloriously with himself.

"No farther can anyone go! I will scratch my name on one of those great red pillars just to show the Lord Buddha how far I jumped. He can come and see for himself. Now—one full leap, and I'm back again on that great hand."

"Stone Monkey!" came the celestial voice, very close to the Monkey's hairy ear. "When are you going to jump ?"

"When ? But I *have* jumped!" replied the Stone Monkey, in deeply offended surprise. "I jumped to the end of space and looked down on nothingness. If you want to see how far I went, get on to my back, and I'll take you there to see. There are five red pillars, and I've scratched my name on one of them to prove to you that in my jump I went all the way."

"Look here, Monkey," said the Lord Buddha, "look at my hand. What do you read upon the second finger ?"

The Stone Monkey peered and peered, then let out a squeal of fright and anger.

"My name, my name! But how did it come to be written there ?" he cried.

"The whole world lies in my hand," replied the Lord Buddha quietly; "the sky and all its stars lie in my hand. How then, Stone Monkey, could you jump out of it ? My hand was under you all the time. No one, not even a Stone Monkey, can ever get beyond my reach. Now, go down to earth, and learn humility."

II

The Princess of the Mountain

ONCE upon a time there lived a Rajah and a Rani, who had only one daughter. She was the most beautiful princess in the world. Her eyes were bright as stars, and her face as fair as a flower. She was called Sarika Bai.

At her birth, all the wise men in the kingdom consulted the stars, and from them read her future. They then told her parents that this would be made up of joy and sorrow. They also foretold that she would grow up both good and beautiful, and that she would marry a prince. More they could not say, and they left the court with rich presents given to them by the Rajah.

One strange thing was noticed about the Princess when she was born. Round her neck hung a chain of gold, and when her parents asked the wise men about the chain, one, the oldest, said:

"This chain holds the soul of the Princess. If it is taken off and worn by another, Sarika Bai will die. Guard it with great care."

On hearing this, the Rajah sent at once for the royal goldsmith, and ordered him to fasten the chains more securely round the neck of the Princess, and as

soon as she was old enough she was told why she must never take it off.

When the Princess was fourteen years old, her beauty was so great that the fame of it spread right across the land. Many princes and nobles came to her father's court to ask her hand in marriage. But to all of them she said no, and her parents did not force her choice, because they had promised her that she should follow her own heart when the time came for her to choose a husband.

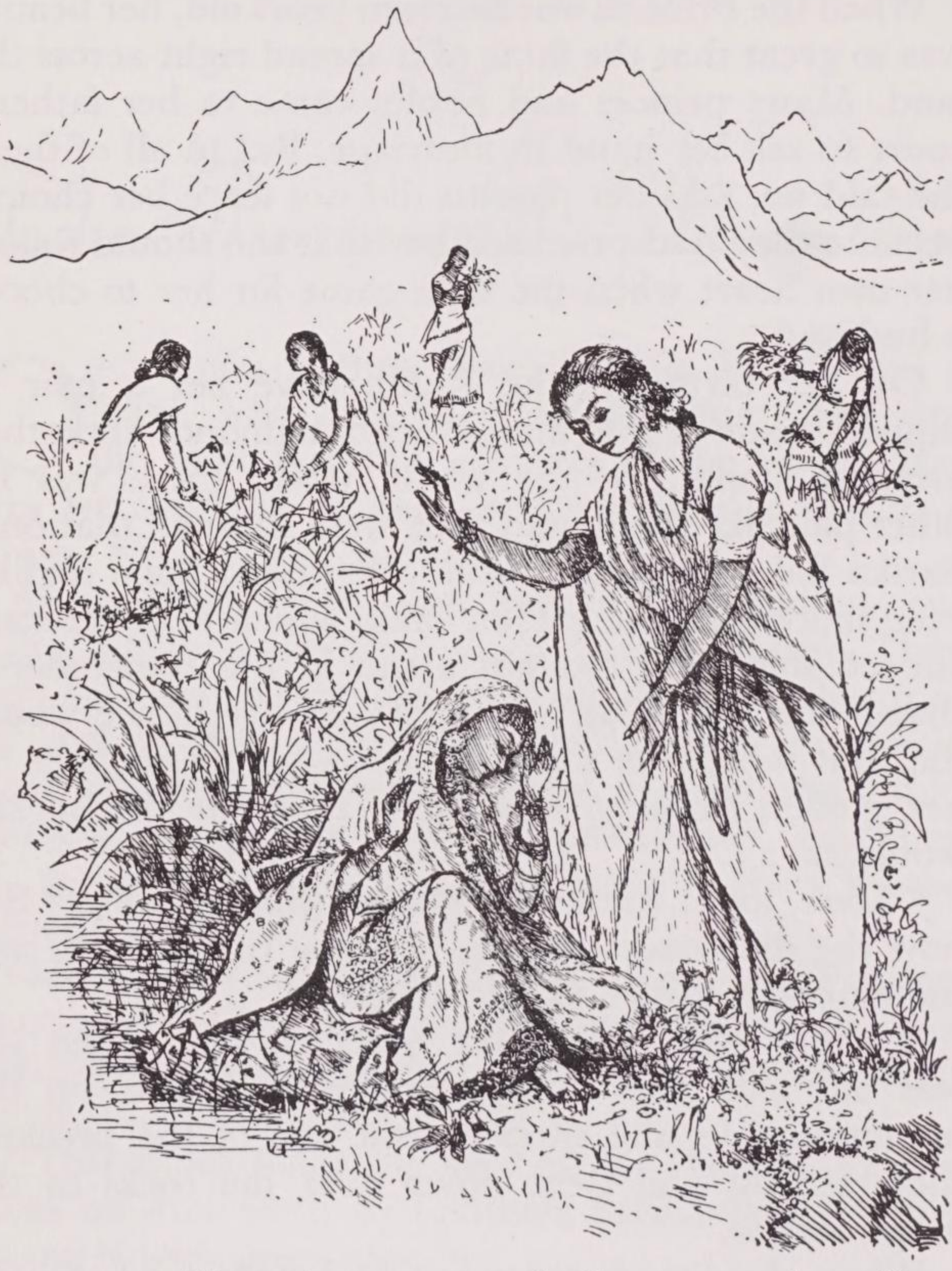
On her birthday, the Rajah gave her a pair of slippers made of gold and set with diamonds and other precious stones. In the whole world there was no other pair like them, and they were so small that only Sarika Bai could wear them. She prized them highly, even more than the golden chain which held her soul. Indeed she never thought about it, nor remembered that if she took it off and another wore it, she would die. But whenever she went out walking she put on her golden slippers, and every time she did so she would say:

"Look, look! Aren't my golden slippers pretty? See how the diamonds sparkle, how the rubies flash, and the emeralds glitter like green fire."

But one day, one most unlucky day, when she was out with her ladies, gathering flowers on the mountain side, she slipped, and one of the precious shoes fell off and went down over the rocks to the jungle below.

When she found out what had happened, Sarika Bai began to weep, and could not be comforted. There she sat among the flowers, one shoe off and one shoe on, the tears rolling down her lovely face.

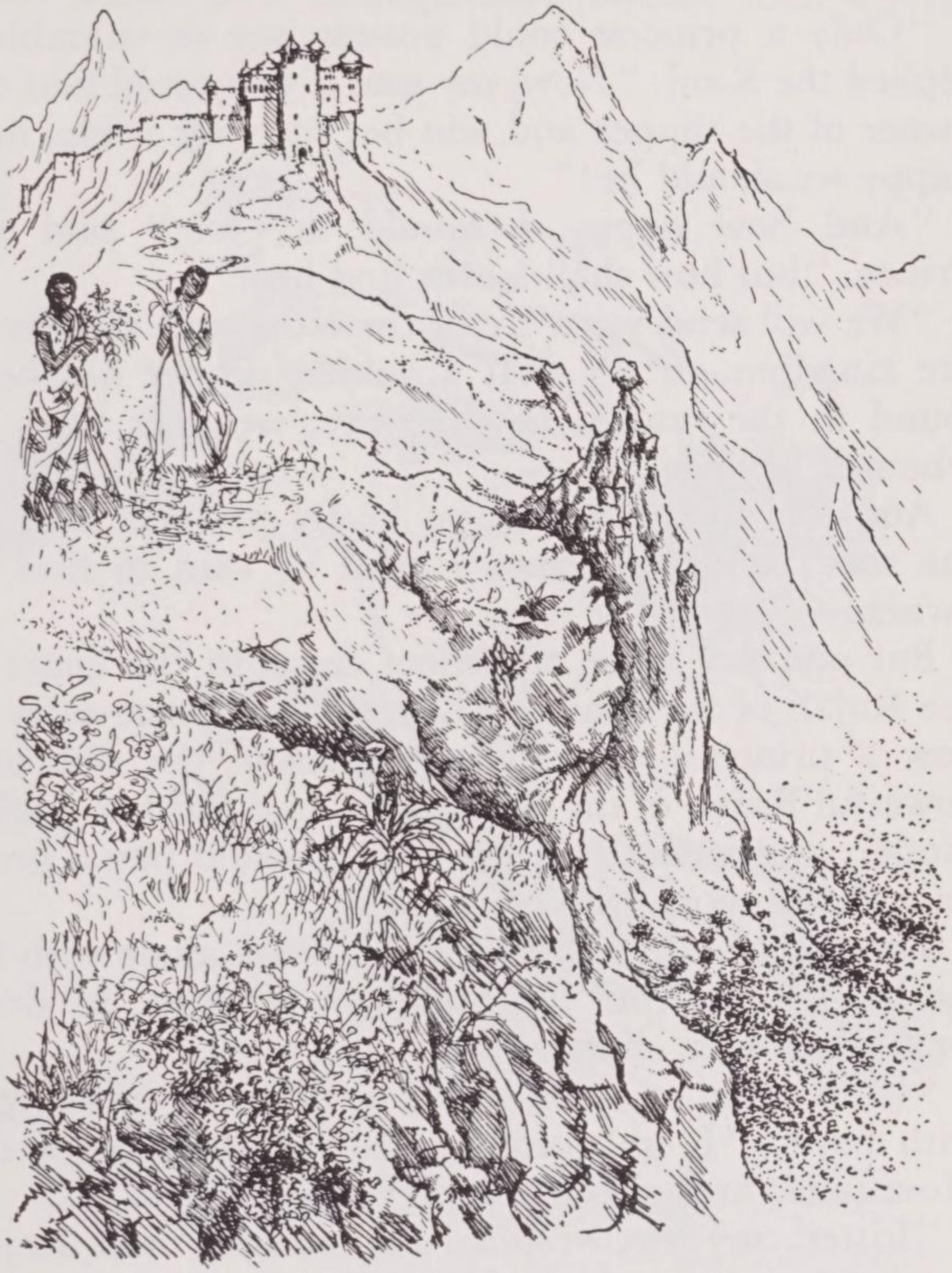
In vain the Rajah told her he would give her another pair far more beautiful, in vain his servants



There she sat among the flowers, one shoe off and

hunted all the rest of the day for the lost slipper; in vain criers went through the city to announce that

whoever returned the slipper would gain a splendid reward. It never came back. It had disappeared.



one shoe on, the tears rolling down her lovely face.

Some time afterwards, a young prince, the son of a Rajah who lived in the plains, was out hunting and

found the slipper in the jungle. He took it home and showed it to the Rani, his mother, saying, "Only a fairy's foot could fit this little shoe."

"Only a princess could possess one so valuable," replied the Rani. "Now, my son, if you could find the owner of the slipper and win her for your bride, how happy we should be!"

"And how happy I should be, too," said the Prince, "but how shall I ever find her?"

"We will send word to all the cities and villages in the kingdom, to say that a golden slipper has been found in the jungle. In this way, we may learn to whom it belongs."

And this they did, but no lovely princess claimed the shoe, and the Prince longed in vain to find its owner.

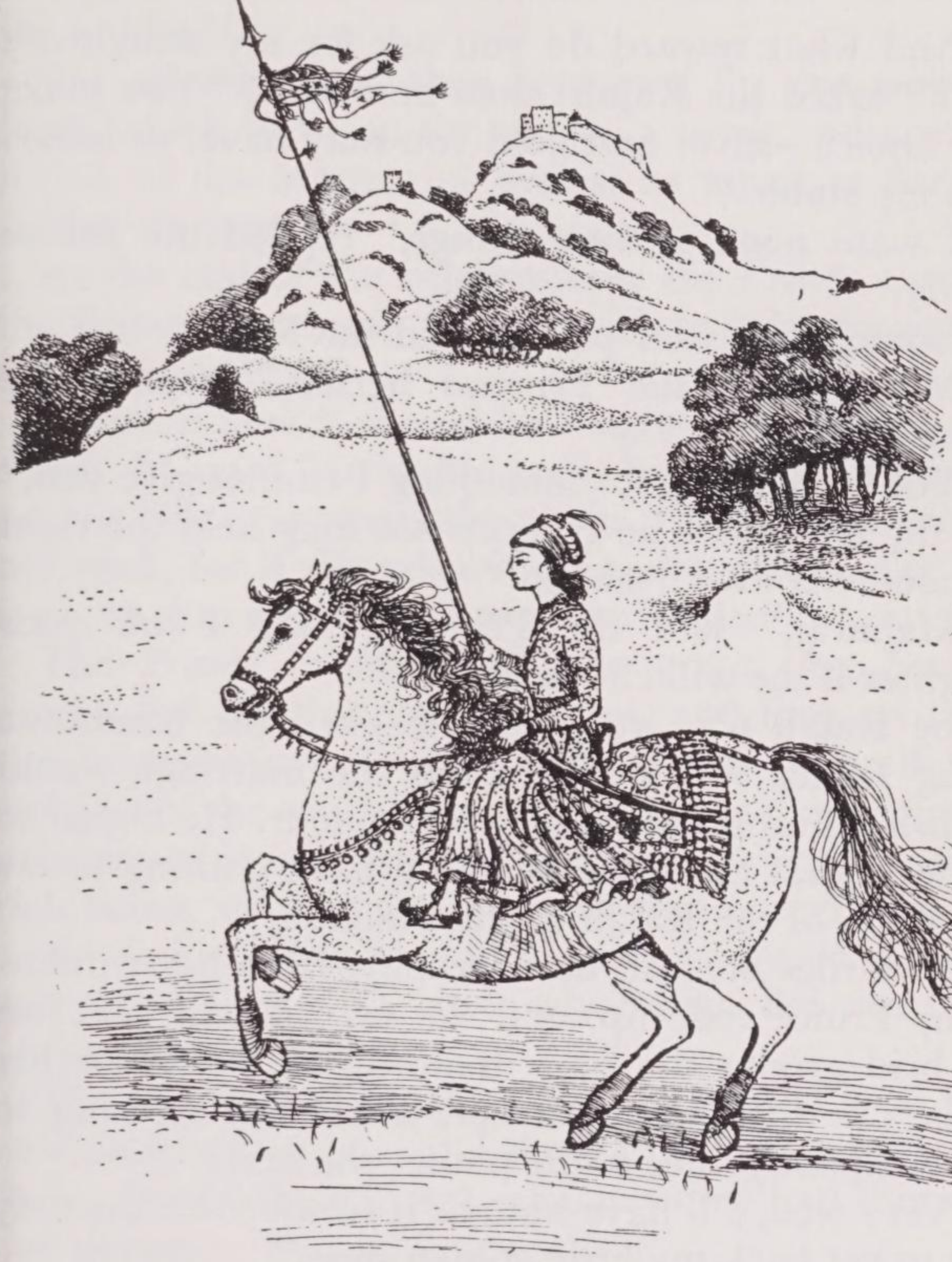
But one day some travellers came to the court of the Rajah of the Plains. They told a strange story of how a princess, the only daughter of the rich and powerful Rajah of the Mountains, had lost her golden slipper, and it was said her father would pay a great reward to anyone who returned it.

The Prince said nothing until he was alone with his mother. Then, from the bosom of his robe, he drew forth the golden slipper.

"I am going on a journey," he said, his eyes bright with hope. "I am going to see the Princess of the Mountains, and give her back this little shoe."

"Listen, my son," replied his mother, "this Rajah is proud and wealthy. He will offer you a great quantity of money, but take neither silver nor gold. Say boldly that you claim the Princess herself in return for the golden slipper."

So the Prince rode away, the slipper safely hidden against his heart. For many days he journeyed across sandy plains and through dark forests, then up the



So the Prince rode away, the slipper safely hidden against his heart.

steep mountain ghat which led to the palace of Sarika Bai's father.

Boldly he stated his errand, boldly he drew forth the slipper and knelt before the Rajah to restore it.

"And what reward do you ask for my daughter's shoe?" asked the Rajah; then he added, "You make your choice—silver and gold you may have, or horses from my stable."

"I want none of these things," replied the Prince quietly.

"Come, state your price," said the Rajah.

"My price is the Princess herself," replied the young man.

"You have asked for something I cannot give you," said the Rajah. "The Princess has long held the right to choose her own husband."

"Maharaj," said the Prince, "may I ask your daughter if she will choose me?"

The Rajah was troubled. He liked the handsome young Prince well enough, but the marriage would not bring him greater power or honour. He hoped in his heart that the Princess would have nothing to say to the son of the Rajah of the Plains.

But Sarika Bai had been peeping from her window as the Prince rode up, and she saw that he was just the bridegroom she had dreamed of. So when her father put the matter to her, instead of refusing to marry a poor prince of the plains, she said:

"Very well, I'll have him, as it seems to be the only way to get back my little golden shoe."

The wedding took place amid great rejoicings. Sarika Bai looked more beautiful than the moon, and

all the princes and nobles who had hoped to marry her were quite annoyed, saying:

"Who is this fellow from the plains? He came with no escort, riding alone as if he'd been just a sowar.[1] He isn't very handsome either. What does Sarika Bai see in him?"

But all the same, they remained for the wedding feast, which went on for almost a week and cost the Rajah of the Mountains almost as much as Sarika's golden slippers.

At the end of the celebrations, the Prince came to the Rajah, and said, "I now wish to take my wife to my own country."

"That is how it should be," agreed the Rajah, with a sigh. "Guard Sarika Bai well, but above all see that no one else ever wears the chain which hangs around her neck, for if she takes it off and someone else puts it on, in that moment your wife will die."

The Prince promised to take great care both of Sarika Bai and her golden chain, and they set off to the bridegroom's country. The Rajah himself rode out part of the way with them, and gave them splendid presents of jewels, money, elephants, camels, horses, rich robes, carpets and rugs, in fact everything they could desire. Then he and his company said farewell, and the Prince with his lovely Sarika Bai continued his journey to the plains.

The old Rajah and Rani were delighted with their new daughter-in-law, and she was at once happy with them. But in the general rejoicing they had forgotten one person.

As was the custom of the country, the Prince had

[1] Sowár: a cavalry soldier.

been married before, and Sarika Bai was not his first wife. She was the one the Prince loved, and the one his parents welcomed. The other one he had married when he was only a little boy, long, long before he had found Sarika Bai's golden slipper. His first wife was a sulky, jealous creature, and although Sarika Bai, knowing the story, treated this Maina Bai as if she were indeed a sister, Maina hated the lovely new bride, and plotted to do her harm.

Then the Rani of the Plains said to Sarika Bai, "Dear child, keep away from Maina Bai. She is angry because you have taken her place with the Prince. I fear she may do you harm."

But Sarika Bai only laughed, as she replied, "I am not afraid of Maina Bai. It is natural that she should resent my coming here. But in time, if I am kind to her, she will come to love me—if only a little."

The old Rani sighed. "I wish I could think so," she said, as she went away.

Soon afterwards the Prince had to go on a long journey, and leave Sarika Bai with his parents, who promised him to watch over her.

But no sooner had the Prince ridden away than the first wife began to plot against her rival.

At first she showed Sarika Bai many little attentions. "We are both lonely," she said one day, "why not spend some of your time with me?"

And Sarika Bai would join her almost every warm evening, taking her jewels and other pretty things to show her co-wife, and treating her as if she were a loved sister. Once she let Maina Bai try to put on the little golden slippers, but they were far too small.

This made the jealous woman very angry, and the

old Rani, hearing the jangle of her voice, asked what was the matter. She was told that Maina Bai was annoyed because she had fewer jewels than the new wife.

And so, again, the old Rani warned Sarika Bai. "Do not trust her," she said. But the girl only replied, "Ah, poor thing! She so much wanted the golden slippers!"

One day, when the two wives were sitting together, Maina Bai asked suddenly. "Why do you always wear that golden chain round your neck, Sarika Bai?"

"Because it contains my soul," replied Sarika Bai simply. "I *must* wear it, for if I took it off and another put it on, I should die."

"Die!" exclaimed Maina Bai, as if she were horrified. "Oh, do be careful, Sarika dear. I hope you have fastened it on securely."

"It is riveted," said Sarika Bai, "but it would slip over my head, I suppose. But I shall not lose it that way, Maina, for I am so happy to be alive, you know."

"Of course you are," agreed Maina Bai; but in her heart a wicked thought came suddenly: "If Sarika Bai died, the Prince might love me once again."

That night she bribed one of her servants to go to the room where Sarika Bai was sleeping; and this the woman did, stealing the chain and slipping it round her own neck. At that moment, the soul of Sarika Bai fled, and she lay as if dead, without breathing.

In the morning when her servants came, they tried in vain to wake her. Then they ran screaming to the old Rani, who hurried to the side of the lifeless girl. They did all they could to bring her back to life, but

she lay still as death, though her cheeks were fresh and blooming, and a happy smile played round her lips.

"Alas, alas!" mourned the old Rani, and all the maidens wept for sorrow that one so sweet and lovely would never speak to them again.

But no one missed the golden chain, or thought that it might have been stolen. All they spoke of was the Prince. Who would tell him? What would he do when he learned of the terrible thing that had happened?

The old Rajah and the old Rani talked for a long time together of how to break the sad news.

"Never to see his young wife again in all her beauty," wept the old Rani; "Never to hear her voice in welcome!"

"He shall see her, even if she cannot welcome him," said the old Rajah. "We will build her a crystal casket, and there she shall rest as if only asleep. In this way our son will always remember her."

So they chose a quiet place in the forest, near a clear pool, and here they placed the crystal casket. Inside lay Sarika Bai, looking as if she were only sleeping. And they gazed their last on her, then went away, saying that only the eyes of her husband should ever rest on her now.

But a strange thing happened. In the dead of night, the wicked servant who had stolen Sarika Bai's golden chain and let her soul escape, took off the chain. Then Sarika Bai came to life and wondered where she was. All round her spread the forest. Outside the crystal casket, a bright moon lit up the lonely scene. Nearby a jackal howled, and a startled bird called from a tree above.

"I am dreaming," thought the poor girl, "dreaming I am lost, and the Prince cannot find me . . ."—and she tried to pray.

Far away, the wicked servant too awoke from a terrible dream, and got up to put on the golden chain. Again the soul of Sarika Bai left her. She heard no more of the forest sounds around her, nor had she any memory left.

And this went on for many days and many nights.

Then the Prince came home. When he heard what had happened to his young wife, he was like a man who has lost his reason. He raved and shrieked, calling upon Sarika Bai to come back to him, or he too would die. Maina Bai came and prostrated herself before him, but he shrank back from her as if she were a poisonous snake.

At last they told him of the crystal casket which they had placed in the forest. Without a word he hurried away.

The sun was hot in the palace gardens, but in the forest it was dim and cool. His feet made no sound on the soft grass. All was silent around the crystal casket where his wife lay like some beautiful statue, a smile on her calm face.

Kneeling beside the precious tomb, the Prince gazed at Sarika Bai. Then all the days they had passed together followed each other in a joyful procession through his mind. How could she be dead, his Princess of the Mountains, his lovely lady of the little golden slippers?

All day he remained beside her, and not a leaf stirred. No bird sang. Daylight faded. The moon rose, and they came from the palace to take him away.

But even as he left, the soul of Sarika Bai came back, and she was alive. The sound of flowing water reached her ears. She arose and left the casket, seeking the pool. There, under the spring which fed it, she made a cup of her two hands and drank from them.

During the night a child was born to her—a son—and she rejoiced greatly. But with the dawn her soul left her, and only the child wept against her silent heart.

That day the Prince did not return to the forest. Worn out by sorrow, he lay sleeping in the palace. But as the moon rose, a great wish to see his wife again caused him to go to the forest. Then he heard a faint cry, and saw Sarika Bai leave the casket, carrying a child in her arms, and go down to the water's edge.

For a moment he was unable to speak or move, so great was his amazement, so terrible his joy. Then he followed her, and watched her bathe her face, and drink from the cup of her hands. The child lay on the bank of the pool, its timid cry like the sound of some tiny wild creature. The mother caught it to her bosom and comforted it, but as she turned, she saw her husband.

For a moment, a silence held them. Then Sarika Bai offered him the child. The Prince sprang towards her, and caught her with the child to his heart. This then, was real. Sarika Bai lived. The rest had been a fearful dream.

Later she told him what had happened, for now she knew that the loss of the chain brought daily death. She had no idea who had robbed her. Her first waking had been inside the crystal tomb. The night passed all too quickly, but, as the sun rose, the wicked

woman put on the golden chain. Sarika Bai's eyes closed, and she lay as if dead.

The Prince rushed back to the palace and demanded that every person in it should at once appear before him. First came the servants of the old Rajah and Rani. They had nothing to fear, and went on their way. Then came the maidens of Sarika Bai, weeping for their dear mistress. They, too, passed on; the Prince had nothing but kind looks for them.

The first wife sent a message to say that she was sick, and unable to obey his command, but the Prince insisted that she and all her servants should pass before him, as the rest had done.

"Take off the necklace," whispered Maina Bai to her servant.

"And bring Sarika Bai back to life?" whispered the woman, in a panic.

"Then hide it deep under your sari," said her mistress, "and hurry past the Prince with your eyes cast down upon the ground."

She herself went slowly, proudly, her throat lightly veiled by the thin gauze of her scarf. The Prince hardly looked at her. His eyes were turned upon her woman who followed.

"Stop!" he cried. "Hold her, guards, and tear open the folds of her sari!" And there shone the necklace, the chain of gold in which lay the soul of Sarika Bai.

"There is no punishment too great for you," said the Prince, as he tore the chain away from the wicked woman's neck. "Take her away," he said to the guards, "and seize her mistress also! Later I will say what is to be done with them."

The palace was in an uproar as the two wretched

women were dragged away. But the Prince heard none of it. He was on his way to the forest carrying the chain which would restore Sarika Bai back to life.

"Come back, Sarika Bai, come back!" he cried, as he placed it round her neck.

Then she opened her eyes, and smiling, caught the child to her and comforted it.

Soon came the old Rajah and the Rani, weeping tears of joy. And Sarika Bai placed the boy in the arms of the Rani, and bent her head to receive the blessings of her husband's parents.

The baby, strong and beautiful, reached out a hand and caught at the shining thing which hung round his mother's neck.

"No, no, my son," said the Prince, "though all the world may be yours some day, the soul of Sarika Bai remains her own."

III

The Crab, the Crocodile and the Jackal

THE Crab and the Crocodile struck up a friendship as they sunned themselves in the mud below the river bank, and, as friends do, they gossiped a lot about the other jungle-folk who came at evening time down to the river to drink. At least, they *came* if they were sure the Crocodile was not in the immediate neighbourhood. Those who had not taken care in this matter had never got home again. The Crab, protected by his shell, was really the only living creature who did not dread and detest the Crocodile. And so it came about that often enough the Crocodile felt very hungry.

One day he said to the Crab, "Have you seen the Jackal about lately?"

"No," replied the Crab, "but I have heard him howl on his lone way just up above there."

"I expect he was howling because he was thirsty," said the Crocodile, "poor little fellow. If you see him, say he is welcome to come and drink from my river whenever he wants."

"He won't do that," declared the Crab wisely.

"He's far too afraid of you, friend Crocodile, to come even within the reach of your shadow."

"Afraid of me?" exclaimed the Crocodile. "I know I'm a terrible fellow when I'm angry. Then my jaws open and shut like the grinding of rocks together, and my tail lashes the water into a froth of foam. But I'm not angry at present. Go up the bank and see if you can find the Jackal, and if you do, remind him how thirsty he is. I will stay here and have a little sleep until supper-time, when I hope the Jackal will have come and gone."

The Crab did as he was told, and found the Jackal sitting behind a rock finishing off a jungle-fowl he had been lucky enough to catch.

"Thirsty stuff jungle-fowl—" began the Crab.

"What makes you say that?" asked the Jackal, coughing up some feathers.

"Oh well, it all comes out of the Crocodile saying that you were welcome to come and drink out of his river whenever you felt thirsty. And I suppose you are now after such a feast."

The Jackal coughed again. It was a tail-feather that had gone down the wrong way.

"There, you see!" continued the Crab. "You might easily choke to death for lack of a drop of water. Why not trot down and get one?"

"Because if I do, the Crocodile will eat me," replied the Jackal frankly.

The Crab looked quite shocked. "You are quite mistaken," he said. "I have lived on the river bank with the Crocodile for quite a long time and, as you see, he has never eaten me yet."

The Jackal began to howl with laughter. "You go

back," he gasped, "and tell your friend the Crocodile that I'm not in the least thirsty, and he can drink all his old muddy water himself. And may it choke him!"

"That's rude" said the Crab severely, and took himself off backwards with a scratching noise to tell the Crocodile how difficult the Jackal had been.

The Crocodile sighed. "It's always like that" he said sadly, "no love or trust left in the world. I shall have to think of something else so that the poor little Jackal gets his drink."

And he let the heavy lids drop over his beady eyes and lay as still as an old log, just where the water met the bank.

But he wasn't asleep. He was cogitating. And suddenly he spoke again. "Friend Crab, I've got an idea. But you will have to help me to carry it out. I will leave the river and go up the bank. There I will lie down under a tree and pretend to be dead. Then you must fetch flowers and spread them over me and set up a crying and a sighing as if you were in mourning for me. The Jackal will then come and drink out of the river and", ended the Crocodile happily, "I shall eat him on the way back."

Now the Crab didn't like the Jackal. He didn't like anyone, or anything, much, so he was willing to help the Crocodile carry out his idea.

"But I must warn you," he said, "that the Jackal is a very cunning creature, or he would have lost his life long ago."

"You go off and do as I ask you. And be sure to cover me all over with flowers. There are heaps of Gul-Mohur[1] blossoms lying under the big tree up

[1] A tree with bright scarlet flowers.

there." And the Crocodile heaved himself out of the mud and made slow, very clumsy progress up the slimy bank.

The Crab set off backwards again, and the Crocodile crawled after him and lay down under the Gul-Mohur tree. He closed his eyes and kept so still that the flies settled on him in swarms. Yet he did not move.

The Crab shovelled up masses of fallen petals and strewed them over his friend until he almost looked like something else. Then he went to find the Jackal—which did not take long, because the Jackal had been watching the whole performance with great glee—to tell him the sad news.

"Ho there, Crab! What are you doing so far from the river?" called out the Jackal.

"I am the bearer of woeful tidings—" began the Crab, and then added, "Alas, it is now quite safe for you to come and drink from the river."

"But I don't want a drink," replied the Jackal.

"But you must—on a hot day like this!" said the Crab. "Be sensible, and come down to the river."

"But what about the Crocodile?" asked the Jackal.

The Crab folded his claws. "Haven't you heard the news?" he asked.

"No," said the Jackal.

"The Crocodile is dead," said the Crab, very solemnly.

"Oh ta-ra-ra-ra!" began the Jackal, with a delighted skip; then changed his tone, "How very sad! But are you sure he is really dead? I have often seen him looking so, and even floating along the river as if he were an old rotten log. Then—snap!"

"I know what you mean," agreed the Crab, "but this time he is really dead . . . dead as an old rotten log, and stranded on the bank high up under a tree I expect the hill climb was too much for him. I have strewn Gul-mohur blossoms over him as a mark of respect. The flies are guarding the corpse."

"How very nice!" said the Jackal; then hastened to add, "That you have covered his remains with flowers, I mean. I should like to have done that. As it is, I will go and drink to the poor old dear's memory, in the river where I shall never see him again."

"Ah me, ah me!" lamented the Crab.

The Jackal bounded off towards the river. After him came the Crab, walking backwards as usual. The Jackal cocked one ear, and had a good look—from a distance—at the Crocodile. He certainly kept very still, and the flies buzzed endlessly as they moved up and down his scaly length from snout to tail.

When the Crab came up, the Jackal closed one eye and said in a whisper, "It's very odd!"

"What's very odd?" asked the Crab.

The Jackal pointed his sharp nose in the direction of the Crocodile. "It's very odd his keeping his tail so still."

"Well, why shouldn't he keep his tail still? He's dead, isn't he?" replied the Crab crossly.

"So you told me," said the Jackal, "and that's why I said it's very odd. I've always been brought up to believe that all dead Crocodiles *wag their tails*. If you ask me, I don't think this one is so dead after all."

Then the Crocodile—who hadn't moved an eyelid all the time the Crab and the Jackal had been talking about him—began to lash his tail so violently that all

the flies rose in an angry cloud in the air, while the Jackal cried out as he made off, "Not so dead after all!" and was out of sight in a moment.

There was nothing for the Crocodile to do but crawl back to the river mud, and blame the Crab for not having managed things better.

The Crab, in his turn, was very offended and removed himself to another part of the river, and so the Crocodile was left quite, quite alone.

IV

The Two Sisters

ONCE, long ago, when the voices of nature said as much as human speech today, there lived two sisters—the daughters of a Shikari[1] employed by the Rajah of Kashmir.

Their home was no more than a mud hut in the forest, and as their father was often away, the two girls spent much time alone.

Now—although they were sisters and near of an age—they could not have been less alike, for Hera, the elder, was selfish, mean and ill-tempered, while Tara, the younger, was as sweet and pretty as a lotus flower, and her greatest wish was to be kind.

Everyone who knew Tara spoke in her praise, but of Hera they would say, "Bah! She's an ugly one, a crosspatch, and as sharp as a prickly-pear." Even the wild animals, the trees, the streams and all that made up the life of the forest, held the same opinion. But Hera went on in her own disagreeable way.

One day, when she had been more peevish and contrary than usual, Tara said to her, "I've been thinking that one of us ought to go and see how grandfather is. He hasn't been well all through the rainy season, and when our uncles and their wives are out at work in the fields, he is quite alone."

[1] A hunter.

"And what if he is?" replied Hera; "I've better things to do than toil through the forest to enquire for an old man. You go if you like, Tara, but don't stay too long, for I want you to mend my sari, and make some chapattis (flat, unleavened cakes), for ours are almost finished. Be sure not to dally on the way, or I shan't let you go again."

So Tara set off alone, and had not been walking for very long when she heard a voice beseeching her to stop. She was just passing under the branches of a plum tree which had been bent and twisted by wind and rain.

"Oh, sweet, kind Tara," said the voice, "do stop and help me, for really I am in a dreadful state!"

Tara peered up into the branches.

"I do believe it is the plum tree speaking," she thought, but was not surprised, as such things happened in her day.

"Yes, it is the plum tree speaking," continued the voice; "my branches are so mixed up by the wind, that when the fruit starts to grow it will have neither sun, nor room, to ripen. Do you think you could straighten things out a bit?"

"Why, of course!" replied Tara, setting her little bundle down; and she set to work with such a will that although her hands were scratched and bruised she pulled out every branch and set it free to the air and sun.

"How nice I feel!" sang out the grateful tree. "Be sure I shall not forget your kindness, little Tara, when next time you come this way."

"I was very glad to help you," said the girl, and went on her way.

She was a bit late, and so began to run, until she came to a smouldering fire—one which, perhaps, had been kindled by a woodman and left to go out.

But the fire had a great wish to blaze again, and spluttered out, "Tara, Tara! Don't be in such a hurry. I'm almost choked by my own ashes!"

"Why, so you are," agreed Tara, "but with this pointed stick I'll soon clear you."

And so she did, until the fire began to sparkle and crackle in a high good humour.

"I'll remember you," the cheerful sound seemed to say.

Tara set off again, but was held up by a broken branch lying across the little path. It had been blown down by the night wind, and was almost severed from its parent tree, a pipal.[1]

"Oh, Tara, Tara!" cried the tree; "just look what the wind has done to me. Really, I cannot spare my little branch. Could you bind it up for me, or it will surely die?"

"And what a pity that would be!" cried the tender-hearted Tara.

But for a moment she was at a loss what to use to bind up the broken branch. She was wearing her best veil, a pretty thing of pink gauze and spangles, put on to please her old grandfather, who liked to see her looking nice.

But there was the little branch! Already its silvery leaves were beginning to shrivel, and she felt a few soft drops of moisture fall on her bare arms. Was the parent tree weeping?

Without another thought, she tore off a strip of her

[1] Pronounced "peopul"—a kind of large fig-tree.

veil and bound up the wounded branch until once again it looked part of the pipal tree.

The tree sighed with pleasure. "Kind Tara, good maiden," it seemed to say. And in almost a whisper, "Maybe I can do as much for you some day."

Tara was now really very late, and she certainly looked a bit untidy running up the path in her torn veil All the same, as she was about to jump over a little stream, she paused to hear what it was complaining about.

"Never was there such an unlucky stream—" were the first words. "All that rain last night has filled me up with leaves and sand. I'll never reach the big river in time to go down with it to the sea! For how can I flow when I'm stifling?"

"How indeed!" exclaimed Tara. And bending down she made a scoop of her hands, and soon had the channel running so clear and clean that the stream simply bounded on its way.

All the same, it sang back to her, "I shall remember you, Tara!"

By this time Tara was so late that she had to take a short cut, scrambling up the rocky hill side and arriving quite out of breath at her grandfather's little hut.

The old man was delighted to see her, but surprised that she—always so neat—had arrived with her veil torn, and her smooth dark hair tangled with bits of twig, leaves, and other forest rubbish.

"What path did you take, my child, to get into such a mess?" he asked rather anxiously.

"The quickest one," she replied; "and on the way I found rather a lot to do."

"No matter which way, or how you come, you are as welcome as sunlight," he said lovingly, and taking her in, set her down to a bowl of milk and some thin wheaten cakes which he had saved from his own frugal dinner.

His sons and their wives were not very generous to him, but as he was so old, he had to put up with them as they were made. Tara was his sweetest comfort, and when the time came for her to go home, he almost shed tears, and begged her to come again soon.

He asked how Hera was, and if she had grown any better-natured.

Tara told him that next time it was Hera who might visit him, but he did not seem very pleased.

"Tell her not to hurry herself," he remarked. "And Tara, my child, I want you to have this bracelet. It belonged to your dear grandmother. I have been keeping it along with other things for you."

Tara, delighted by the beautiful present, still did not accept it at once. "My aunts, your sons' wives, won't they be jealous and angry if I have the bracelet?" she asked.

"Who cares if they are!" shouted the old man, suddenly quite angry. "Those women, they aren't at all kind to me. I won't give one of them a thing which should be yours!"

And he slipped the bracelet over Tara's slender hand, and pushed it into place on her arm where it shone like a collar of gold.

"And I've another—as well as ear-rings and a brooch," he chuckled in great glee, "Now, if your aunts had known where I hid them, I should have nothing to give away."

Tara looked at her bracelet, and then into the face of her grandfather.

"I love you best of anyone in all the world," she said, her arms round his neck.

"And I you," he replied. "But run off, because the moon is rising, and I don't want you to be snapped up by a hungry panther, or frightened by a lone jackal."

When Tara got home, she found Hera in a fine fit of sulks.

"You didn't tell me you were going to be away all the day!" she exclaimed. "I've had everything to do, and no one to talk to—." Suddenly, she gave a little shriek. "What's that shining on your arm?" she demanded, and rushing at Tara, tried to drag the bracelet down.

"Grandfather gave it to me," said Tara, in self-defence. "Oh, stop tugging at it, Hera, you're hurting my arm."

"And what did he send for me?" asked Hera, her eyes glittering, and her colour rising in jealous rage.

"He only—gave me—this . . ." replied Tara, her hand over the bracelet.

"And that's why you were so anxious to visit him!" scoffed Hera. "Well, I shall go myself tomorrow, and if I don't get a bracelet too, I shall take yours."

The next morning, Hera was off at dawn. But when she came to the plum tree, and it cried out, "Oh, Hera! Please stop and tidy up my branches a bit, there's a good girl!" Hera only tossed her head, and called back, "I've better things to do than to oblige a plum tree."

And it was the same with the pipal, the fire and the stream. Indeed, she was especially rude to the stream,

who struggled on with its load of leaves and sand, muttering vengeance.

When Hera reached her grandfather's hut, she found the old man sitting without fire, or food, and not appearing at all glad to see her. To be truthful, he had seen her coming, and made haste to hide everything she might take a fancy to.

She wasted no time in asking him about his health, but began at once to clamour for a present.

"You gave Tara a fine gold bracelet," she complained, "and I'm the eldest, Grandfather. Surely that should have been mine!"

But the old man was as cunning as she was greedy. "I must ask your aunts," he said. "My eldest son's wife expects to get the first choice of anything I have left. I gave Tara the bracelet, it is true. She was the first to come and see me, and how was I to know you would follow next day?"

Hera, who could have burst out crying with rage and disappointment, poked about the poor little hut, but all she found was a scorpion which gave her a taste of its sting.

"'ow, 'ow, 'ow!" she wailed; for a scorpion can sting very nastily, and she made off without so much as saying goodbye to her grandfather, who laughed as he hadn't laughed for years. Then, when she was out of sight, he brought out the dinner he had hidden, and also had a look at other treasure tucked away.

But when Hera reached home, she set on Tara at once.

"It's all your fault, you sly thing!" she began; "and of course, Grandfather meant the gold bracelet for me as I'm the eldest."

"Did he say so?" asked Tara in surprise. Then added generously, "Well, you certainly are the eldest, and here is the bracelet, Hera. When it is on your arm, I can look at it, anyway."

So Hera kept the bracelet, and Tara had nothing.

The weeks went by, and news came that the old grandfather was not so well.

"One of us should go and see if we can do anything for him," said Tara.

But Hera shook her head, "You can go if you like," she replied. "I had enough of grandfather last time! He gave me nothing, and I got a scorpion's sting I shan't forget in a hurry."

So it was Tara who set off again, but this time the plum tree did nothing more than wish her a safe journey, and so it was with the pipal, the fire and the stream. They remembered her, and blessed her, but asked for no help which they did not appear to need.

When she reached the little hut, she found her grandfather better than she had expected, and he had —as before—saved her the best of his food. The fire was lit, and when they had finished the milk and cakes, the old man got up and, going over to the wall of the hut, scratched about, and then to Tara's great astonishment lifted out a huge stone. Behind it was a hole big enough for a man to hide in.

"Only I know about this," said the grandfather; and he drew out first of all, a spinning wheel, then a set of brass pots—which he called lotahs—and all sorts of costly and beautiful things . . . the hoard of a lifetime . . . the treasures of his young wife.

"You are so like her," he said, straightening his back, "She was sweet, kind, and pretty, too; her eye-

brows were like yours—half-moons above her big dark eyes. And now, you shall take these things I gave her with you to your own home, in case those squabbling women married to my sons, find out my secret."

Tara could hardly speak. But she managed to say things which the old man wanted to hear. Suddenly a thought struck her. "Grandfather," she said, in a low tone, "you have given me far too much. More than I can possibly carry."

"Of course you can't *carry* the things," he replied promptly; "I never expected it. And so I am going to give you my little buffalo. I bred her myself. She is as clever as any human being, and will take you and all your property safely home. And she will be most useful to you in other ways. There never was better milk than hers, or richer butter from it."

"Will you have all the milk you want for yourself if I take your buffalo?" asked Tara anxiously.

"I shall have everything I want if I know you are happy," said the old man, stroking her hair.

And so Tara returned home, laden like a bride going to the house of her bridegroom.

The buffalo stepped out daintily, and would not have paused had not the stream called out to Tara, "Oh, my dear, what luck! I have a present for you, but I was afraid it would be too much for you to carry. But I see you have your own buffalo."

Tara looked at the stream, and right across its width was a length of glorious silver cloth.

"Make a wedding sari[1] for you," said the stream. "I have brought it down from my source in the hills, where the fairies weave such things."

[1] The main outer garment of a Hindu woman.

Tara, hardly able to express her thanks, gathered up the silver cloth, and added it to her other possessions. Then the buffalo stepped again on its way.

But as the pipal tree was reached, a little sound made Tara look up, and there—hanging from the branch she had bandaged—hung a string of large pearls.

"They are for you, Tara," said the pipal. "I took them from a Prince's turban when he rode beneath my shade. Accept my gift as a reward for your kindness."

Tara fastened the pearls round her slender throat, and went on her way rejoicing.

"Not so fast, not so fast, my pretty!" crackled the fire. "I am sure you must be hungry. See, I have baked you a cake."

So lucky Tara took the cake and, dividing it into two pieces, put one aside for her sister, and ate the other whilst on her homeward way.

Now, when she reached the plum tree, the topmost branches were weighted down by glorious ripe and yellow fruit. "Take some, take as many as you want, Tara," said the laden tree. "All have been ripened for you as a reward for your freeing my branches."

Tara gathered her veil full, and eating a few, set aside the rest for Hera; for it was her intention to share everything equally with the cross, unhappy girl.

But when she arrived home, instead of being grateful to the kind little sister, Hera flew into a violent rage.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" sighed Tara; "perhaps if you went to visit Grandfather he might be as generous to you."

"Of course I'm going to visit him," retorted Hera, "and I shall take care to get even more than he gave you."

As soon as it was light, she rushed away.

"Hee-hee!" jeered the plum tree, as she passed under its branches.

"Tee-hee!" tittered the pipal, as the girl went by.

"Crack!" exploded the fire, its way of laughing; but Hera was too intent upon getting to the little hut to notice tree, fire, or even stream, although the latter had something to say.

As before, she found the old man cold and comfortless. "I have come for my share of presents," she cried, without more ado.

"What presents, girl?" he mumbled in his beard.

"Well, as much and as many—if not more—than you gave to Tara," she replied.

"You're dreaming," he said, "or I am. Now what would a poor old creature like me have to give to anyone? It's as much as I can do to get a bite of food from those women, the wives of my sons."

Just as he finished speaking, in came her uncles and their wives.

"Now we've caught her!" shouted one of the men; and the other said, "Yes! And what have you done with father's little buffalo you drove away yesterday, with much else?"

"Little thief!" screamed one of the wives, and showed her nails.

"Vagabond!" shrieked the other, and pummelled Hera hard.

"Is this the girl who robbed us yesterday?" one and all cried, and the old man nodded vaguely.

"It might have been," he quavered, "although I must say she didn't look quite so ugly then."

"But how did she get at your hoard?" asked the elder son, glowering at Hera, who shrank back at the sight of a knife he had in his belt.

The old man shook his head. He had no sense at all in his face. "Might have fallen asleep for a few minutes," he replied quite piteously. "I do drop off from hunger, now and then."

"And you came again to rob us!" screeched the aunts. "We will treat you as you deserve!"

And they took hold of the terrified Hera, and bustled and hustled her out of the hut on to the forest path. As she ran off screaming, they pelted her with plum stones, for they had a plum tree, too.

She was glad to get away with her life, and was hot, bruised, and very hungry.

"Never mind," she thought, "the fire will have a cake for me, the pipal will give me its pearls, the tree sweet fruit, and the stream a length of cloth—gold for me, far better than the silver piece Tara brought home."

But she got none of these things. For as she came to the stream, there indeed was the gleaming cloth, gold—and not silver; but as she stooped to grab it, she lost her footing and fell into a deep pool.

And the stream—knowing what was good and what wasn't—carried her on, on, until it reached the river, who, with many other bits of flotsam and jetsam, made a present of her to the sea.

V

The Wild Geese and the Tortoise

On the banks of a pool there once lived a pair of Wild Geese—simple, friendly creatures, who liked to live at peace with their neighbours, and were always ready to do a good turn for anyone. And under a stone on the edge of the same pool lived a Tortoise, a grumpy, quarrelsome old fellow, but all the same the Wild Geese were fond of him, as we shall see.

As the hot weather set in, the water in the pool began to dry up, the lotuses to wither, and the fish to gasp and one by one die.

Then said one Wild Goose to the other, "Does it strike you, my dear, that it is time for us to move?"

"Indeed it does," replied the second Goose; "for some days now I have become very anxious—the water was drying up so fast. We must lose no time in flying off to some cooler place, where we can remain without dying of thirst."

"That is just my opinion," agreed the first Goose, "but we will do nothing without consulting our friend the Tortoise. He is so old, that he must also be wise."

So they went to find the Tortoise who was asleep under his stone. When the Geese awakened him he

was not in the best of tempers, and said crossly, "What a very strange time to call! The middle of the day, when the sun is so hot! Surely anything you had to say could wait until the evening. I had just dropped off to sleep, and it would have been sensible of you both to sleep too!"

The first Goose stood on one leg, looking anxious. "My dear old friend," he began, "we were too worried to sleep. Have you noticed how quickly the pool is drying up, and how many of the fish have died? Soon we shall have no water."

"Not a drop. Not one single drop. Only dry mud," sighed the second Goose.

But the Tortoise was as obstinate as he was aged. "If that's all you've come to say, you can go back again," he mumbled. "Pool drying up? Nonsense! I have lived here for hundreds of years, and the pool has never been dry yet. Never has, and never will be. I am going off to sleep again."

And the old creature closed his puffy eyelids over his beady eyes and forgot all about the Wild Geese, who went back sadly enough to look again at the pool.

They were quite right. It was drying up. Even the mud was cracking in hard cakes, and still the sun beat down on it and everything else.

"Whatever the Tortoise thinks, it's time for us to fly," said the first Goose.

"I think so, too," agreed the other; "but it would be more respectful if we went to say goodbye to him. After all, he is an old friend—if a difficult one—and it would be a pity to hurt his feelings."

So back they went again to find the Tortoise wide awake, and looking anxious. He had felt thirsty and

crawled down for a drink, but only found dry mud. He now began to blame the Wild Geese for not telling him about all this sooner.

"It was very foolish and unkind of you not to tell me the pool was drying up," he complained. "How do you expect me to find out these things for myself? I am not as young as I was. My sight is not as good as yours. One would expect friends to be a help at a time like this."

"But we did come and tell you—" began the first Goose.

"Do not interrupt me!" snapped the Tortoise. "Have you no respect for the old? Now that the pool has dried up, what are you going to do about it?"

"We are going to fly away," said the second Goose.

"Fly away? Well, I never heard anything so selfish!" scolded the Tortoise. "Fly away, indeed! And what about me, pray?"

"If only you had wings," mourned the first Goose.

"Wings! Wings!" The Tortoise was working himself up into a fine temper. "If only you had got sense! You say one silly thing after another. If I had wings, do you suppose I should be gasping here now? No! And it is entirely due to your carelessness that I am. You should have seen long ago that the pool was drying up. Anyway, you'll have to find a way of taking me with you when you go."

"We have an idea," began the first Goose.

"If you will agree to it, Sir," put in the second.

"How can I say what I'll agree to until I know what your idea is," said the Tortoise.

"We thought that if we got a stick, and each of us took one end in our beaks—" went on the first Goose.

"—that we could take you with us, Sir," added the second Goose, hopefully.

"And where do I come in?" asked the Tortoise coldly. "You have a stick in your beaks—"

"Which you could hold on to by your teeth, and we could carry you to another pool," explained the first Goose kindly.

"It doesn't sound a very comfortable way of travelling," grumbled the Tortoise.

"It's the best we can do," said the second Goose, humbly.

"Very well. Get the stick." The Tortoise heaved himself off his stone as he spoke, when a horrid idea struck him. "Suppose I fall off!" he exclaimed in a fright.

"If you keep silence for the whole of the journey, you won't," said the first Goose.

"Whatever happens, you must not say one word. Even if anyone abuses you, or makes rude remarks. You must just put up with it," advised the second Goose.

"Your life depends on it," said the first Goose, very solemnly.

"Humph!" grunted the Tortoise, "I can't say I am looking forward to this odd journey. But what are you waiting for? We ought to be off."

So the kindly Wild Geese got a long stout stick, and each taking an end, with the Tortoise clinging on to the middle—after making a great fuss before he was settled—they soared up! up! up! into the sky. The Tortoise would have objected to this but he dared not utter a sound in case he should tumble to the ground and be killed.

Away flew the Wild Geese on swift and powerful wings, over plains and valleys, forests and high mountain tops. Soon they were passing over a hill village where they came down a little, for now they were nearing the pool they knew would not be dry. The village boys were flying kites, but hearing the whirr of wings looked up and, seeing the Tortoise hanging on to the stick by his teeth, they started to laugh and jeer.

"Look, look!" cried one. "There's a funny sight! An old Tortoise on a stick the geese are carrying."

"If he falls off, I'll have his shell," said another. And they all began to shout abuse at the Tortoise until he was ready to burst with rage.

The Wild Geese implored him to keep calm, but as the whoops and hurrahs of the boys grew louder, his fury rose to such a pitch that he could no longer contain himself, and he shouted out, "How dare you! How dare you insult one who is a thousand years older than your grandfather!"

And with this, of course, he let go of the stick, and falling to the ground, was smashed to atoms.

Then the Wild Geese flew on with mournful cries. "We did our best," they grieved; "we did, we did!"

And at last they came to a place where there was a beautiful pool quite full of water, and what was more delightful still, another Tortoise—very like their lost friend, but much better-tempered.

And so they all lived happily there for the rest of their days.

From "The Fables of Bidpai"; also cited in the Jatakas.

VI

The Boy with the Moon on his Forehead

THERE once lived a king in Northern India who, although he had more wives than one—as was the custom of the country—had yet no son. And this was a source of deep sorrow to him, for he felt himself under a curse.

One day when he was walking in the gardens of his Palace, he heard the sound of merry laughter and, peeping through a clump of oleanders, he caught sight of a group of girls at play beside the waters of the lake. There were about six of them—none more than fifteen years old—and the prettiest of them all the King recognised as being the daughter of his gardener.

She was dancing about until the bangles on her arms and ankles rang like a peal of little bells, and as she danced she chanted in a sing-song voice:

"What then your fortune, Lakshmi?
Your fortune, your fortune?
What then your fortune, Lakshmi?
Ho! A boy like the moon."

A burst of laughter from her companions halted the girl's song and dance, but as soon as they had sobered

down she began again, but this time speaking, and quite seriously.

"I sing of what is in my horoscope," she said, "for when I am married it foretells that I shall have a son . . . a son beautiful as a young god, with a moon on his forehead."

This boast was too much for her playfellows. "Do listen," cried one; "this vain Lakshmi claims a horoscope fit for a queen, and she a mere gardener's daughter!"

Lakshmi tossed her head proudly. "The daughter of the King's gardener," she retorted. "I live under the royal smile."

"Oh you do, do you!" thought the King, smiling to himself in his hiding place, for the sight and sound of this charming girl made him forget for a moment his quarrelsome wives, and all the tiresome business of his State. And he might also have forgotten his chief sorrow, that he had no heir to follow him, had not the words which the gardener's daughter sang reminded him of it.

"This humble chokri (little girl)," he said to himself, "can cherish the hope of having the son I yearn for. What is the use of being a King if one's heart's desire is withheld?"

Lakshmi, who, of course, had no idea she had been overheard, was now trying to fish out some lotus buds from the edge of the lake. She wanted them to place in a knot against the coil of her shining hair—or maybe make ear-rings of them and pretend they were large pearls.

The King watched her. To him she appeared completely beautiful. Every movement she made was full

of grace and vigour. No star could be brighter than her eyes, no rose petal as delicate as the bloom on her cheek; her lips were redder than the juice of a pomegranate, and her tiny hands as fragile as the lotus buds she was trying to reach.

"If she is as good as she is beautiful," thought the King, "what a queen she would make!"

The thought spread like fire through his veins. He had heard her speak of a horoscope which promised her great things. Well, he would speak to her father and say he desired to marry the girl. What matter if his other wives tore their hair in jealous rage? This was his affair, not theirs. None of them had given him a son. They had all had their day, and he was still generous to them. This was as far as he would go.

Love at first sight had come to him on seeing this little Lakshmi. And with a happy sigh he stole softly away to put his romantic plan into action.

When the gardener was told that the King wanted to see him immediately, he was full of foreboding. Had he done anything to merit the royal anger? A melon, or mango, picked here and there as a present to his wife? A few flowers, perhaps, for a wedding-garland? Who could miss these with every tree and bush laden?

So he went into the King's presence in great trepidation, and made not one but several prostrations at the royal feet.

But the King bade him rise, smiling so graciously that the poor man revived and waited to hear his master's pleasure.

"You have a daughter—," began the King.

"Majesty, I have seven," stammered the gardener.

This rather staggered the King, but he waved his hand as if disposing of all girls except one.

"You have a daughter called Lakshmi," he continued; and then added, as if he were only asking for a rose, "I wish to marry her."

If the sky had fallen at his feet the gardener could not have been more astonished. Indeed, he was quite unequal to making any reply.

"I have surprised you," said the King, "but I happen to know that this daughter of yours has a favourable horoscope, and that the omens are also favourable if I make her my wife."

The gardener felt his courage returning, and even swelled out a little with pride.

"What your Majesty condescends to say about the girl is indeed true. We have been led by the Joshiti (astrologer) to believe that she is under divine protection; and", he added, "she is personable."

"Very," agreed the King abruptly. "So let us waste no time in making arrangements for her to come to the Palace. What price do you ask for her?"

The gardener was about to say one hundred rupees, but suddenly he thought, "With a daughter married to the King, I cannot possibly continue to work in his garden. I must ask a sum which will enable me to set up on my own."

So he named a thousand rupees. If the King was surprised at the amount, he made no sign, but sending for his Treasurer ordered him to bring three bags of silver.

The gardener left in high delight, and that night he gave a feast to all his relations.

As soon as matters could be arranged, the marriage

took place. The King supplied the little bride with all the jewels and dresses suited to her new rank. If the other wives raged in secret, they appeared resigned; and the King, to appease any jealousy on their part, gave each of them a splendid jewel. But to Lakshmi he gave all his love.

A year later—during which the King had met with no reason to make him regret his unequal marriage—the time drew near for the young queen to have a child. And now the other wives came constantly to visit her.

One day the senior wife said, "It seems to us, dear child, that the King is away hunting a great deal more than he was in our young days. It must be very wearisome for you to spend so much time alone."

The other wives nodded their heads and rolled their big eyes, to show they quite agreed with this. But Lakshmi, with her gay sweet smile, made light of her loneliness.

"I don't mind at all," she said, "for in the daytime I have so many pleasant things to do and think of. Just look! Only yesterday the King gave me that cradle all slung with silver bells. Isn't it beautiful?"

The other wives stared at the cradle, ready to burst with rage and envy.

"You must invite us to rock it sometimes," said one; and another added, "How fortunate you are, Lakshmi! But we love you all the same."

"Still, we all think," insisted the senior wife, "that the King ought to pay you more attention, especially at such a time. Suppose you were suddenly taken ill when he was so far away. How could you let him know?"

Lakshmi's bright smile faded. "I don't feel at all ill," she replied, "but even so, I will speak to the King about this when he returns."

And she did, also asking him if he still really loved her.

"Little stupid" he teased with his gayest laugh. "Now if you ever want to summon me in a hurry I will show you how you can do so. But mind you don't share the secret with those meddlesome women."

And he went to a big almirah[1] and took from it a little drum. It was gaily painted and laced by strong cords from which hung another cord. And to this was attached a small grey stone.

"Now listen!" said the King returning to Lakshmi's side, and he rattled the stone against the parchment ends of the drum until a most penetrating rattle resulted.

From all parts of the Palace guards and servants rushed up to see why they had been summoned.

"We don't require any of you," said the King curtly; and they all melted away telling each other that their master was now showing the gardener's girl how to sound the monkey tom-tom which no woman of noble birth would condescend to do.

Next day the King went off to hunt as usual while Lakshmi played with the silver bells on the cradle, soothed by their sweet sound. But every now and then she picked up the monkey tom-tom and very softly rattled it to awaken its strange sound. From where they were plotting against her the other wives heard it.

"What is she about now!" asked one.

[1] Wardrobe.

"We will go and find out," said another.

And they all trooped off led by the senior wife and marched into Lakshmi's room.

"Why did you sound the little drum?" asked the senior wife in a voice of great surprise.

Lakshmi blushed. "I was just seeing if I could make it sound," she replied.

"What for?" enquired the senior wife.

"Oh well," explained Lakshmi, "my lord gave it to me last night when I asked him how I might summon him quickly if in need."

All the wives tittered.

"He treats you like a toy," said one.

"*We* had no need for such a thing," put in another scornfully.

"No, indeed," said the senior wife, "for the King was ever within call."

"Lakshmi's eyes filled with tears. "You are trying to make me unhappy," she cried; "but whatever you say, I know the King loves me—"

"Why not test him?" broke in the senior wife. "Sound the little drum, Lakshmi, and if he responds quickly to its summons we shall all know you are his first care."

"I would rather not sound the drum for no reason," murmured Lakshmi, in a low and troubled voice, "and yet . . ."

Suddenly she seized the drum and rattled it soundly. This was more than the wives had expected, and fearing the sudden return of the King, they scuttled back to their own quarters. And none too soon, for the King—who had not been far away—rushed into the Palace in his haste to know what ailed his little wife.

"Whatever is the matter?" he almost shouted.

"Nothing, husband," admitted Lakshmi, adding bravely, "I just sounded the little drum to see if what you told me about it was really true, and that its sound would bring you back to me."

"It was a silly trick," said the King, and his voice was surly. "I would have you know, Madam, that I do not make a habit of telling lies. You will oblige me by not sounding the drum again unless you really need me."

And he flung out of the room in a really kingly temper, leaving Lakshmi in floods of frightened tears.

The following day he set out to hunt without saying goodbye to her, and the other wives rejoiced to see him go. After a while, they went again to visit Lakshmi and she upbraided them for giving her such bad advice.

"Well really, my dear, we ought to know how to treat a royal husband, royal ourselves as we all are. Had any of us sounded the drum—if we ever touched such a thing—the King would have been complimented that we were so anxious to see him. But of course, you are at a great disadvantage, not born to play the royal game. All the same, you should practise at it, and in your place I should certainly sound the drum again."

"No, I will not," cried Lakshmi, "I will not make my dear King angry again." And then, almost in a whisper, "I dare not sound the little drum."

"The King is a fickle fellow," said the senior wife, "and it is more than likely that some pretty girl—the daughter of a forester, or some such humble person—has caught his eye. Now, Lakshmi, be sensible. Show your power by sounding the drum. The King will

come to think all the better of you for showing some spirit."

"I will not sound the drum," muttered Lakshmi; but all the time her fingers played with the cord which held the stone.

The senior wife took the girl's cold hand. "Listen," she said, in a voice as sweet as honey, "although we are all disappointed women, we seek your good. It is not right of the King to leave you so much just now. So, to make sure of his devotion, sound the little drum."

And Lakshmi did. In a kind of wild, unthinking fury she rattled it again and again, and in the court-yard below the guards sniggered, one saying, "There is the mad little Rani, at her tricks again."

But they scattered as the King came galloping home and, throwing his reins to a groom, leapt up the marble staircase and flung into Lakshmi's room.

"What is it?" he cried, for the girl lay sobbing on her couch. "Are you ill?" he asked tenderly.

"No, not ill," she replied in shaken tones, "but oh, so sorry I was foolish enough to sound the drum without good reason."

He sprung up as if a snake had bitten him.

"So!" he sneered, "you have tried to fool me twice. You shall not have a third chance. You may sound the drum forever, but I will not come."

And before she could answer him, or explain, he had gone.

"Now," gloated the senior wife, who had been peeping through the bamboo purdahs, "we have the chit in our power. We must make full use of it."

The next day Lakshmi was taken really ill. The

terror and grief she felt at the King's anger had quite unnerved her.

In a frenzy she seized the drum and rattled it incessantly. But the King, although he heard it, had lost all faith in her, and rode even deeper into the forest.

The sun set in a vivid crimson. The shadows deepened in the Palace room. A lone Jackal howled as it crossed the maidan,[1] and a prince was born.

But his mother lay all unconscious of her glory, and of the brilliant light in which her son came into the world—the light of the moon on his infant forehead, the godlike sign of his celestial origin.

An old woman, long in the service of the Palace ladies, rushed to the senior wife with the news of the birth.

"Aie!" she wailed; "the worst has happened! The low-born one has given the King the son he has so long prayed for to the gods. And the child, too, is like a young god with a moon shining on his forehead."

"There is no time to lose!" exclaimed the senior wife. "Has the mother seen the child?"

"Jijabhai, did you not give me orders to mix the drink of sleep and give it to the girl? She will know nothing for many hours," replied the old woman.

"Listen, Nurse," said the senior wife, "it is not right, nor seemly, that the child now born should reign over a proud people. It is not right that I and my co-wives should suffer the affront of being pushed on one side. Where is the child now?"

"In the cradle of bells." The nurse watched her mistress closely as she spoke.

[1] Maidān: an open space, parade ground.

"Ah," muttered the senior wife; "I will go with you and see this marvel."

The two women slipped on naked feet along the many passages that led to the room where Lakshmi lay drugged and dreamless. But as they entered the darkened room, one corner appeared to be brightly lit. It was the corner where the cradle swung, and in it lay the little Prince, content and sleeping.

The senior wife looked down at him. Her face was terrible to see.

"If he lives," she whispered, "he will destroy us all. Take him away, Nurse. Find your own way to his destruction—but if you fail, your own life shall end."

The old nurse shivered. "Jijabhai!" she pleaded; "this is no ordinary child. Look, look at his forehead! See, even in sleep he smiles."

"I have spoken," replied the senior wife; "if he lives many will die."

"But the empty cradle," quavered the nurse; "when the girl awakens, what shall we say?"

"The empty cradle?" echoed the senior wife. Then, with a cruel look, came the sharp command, "Fill it!"

The nurse shrank back. For thirty years this woman had ruled her.

"Fill it? But how?" she asked.

"With some sweeper's brat," replied her mistress; "you will know how to find one newly born. But let it be as ugly as a monkey. And give its mother five rupees." Then she added, "Waste no time, for the King is sure to return by sunset tomorrow."

She took another long look at the sleeping infant, and then with one of hard meaning at the nurse, went away.

The deed was done. That night the old nurse carried a burden so light that she asked no aid. Only a faint moon lit her way to the forest where, with no help, she buried a silver box which contained the still sleeping child. Then she returned by another path to the Palace, quite sure that she had not been seen.

But she was wrong. For Shankar, the King's favourite hound, had watched her start on her grim journey and, curious about the thing she carried, shadowed her without making a sound. He let her return before taking a sniff at the newly turned mould and leaves. There was something under them which he wanted to investigate.

Very easily he uncovered the box. But even for a dog of his strength and sagacity it would be difficult to get it out of the hole. Then as he was working all round it with teeth and strong paws, he heard a little cry. It went straight to his heart. He, who had grown up in untarnished loyalty to his master, responded to the call of that master's son.

Soon, he had completed his task. The box was not locked. The hasp came open very easily, and the light from the baby's forehead shone straight into the eyes of the faithful dog.

But now he had more work to do. He had the sense to know that he could not leave things as they were. Just behind the hole which the nurse had dug was a big banyan tree, old and with a hollow in its trunk as deep as a small cave. The hollow had filled up with dry leaves and soft moss, and inside it Shankar placed his Prince.

But even princes cry when they are hungry. He must get this little, helpless thing some food. And who

better to provide it than Kuri, the King's special cow?

She was a beautiful, white creature from Kabul, and Shankar knew her well. They could, as animals did and may still do, speak each other's language. He made all speed to her stable, and found her awake and very ready to help him.

"I was afraid something like this might happen," she said. "Those are really wicked women at the Palace, and I fear we may not be able to withstand them."

"I have been thinking," replied Shankar, "that it might be wiser to transfer the little Prince to some hiding-place deeper in the forest. The tree where he now is can be seen very easily from one of the paths."

"Well, I think," suggested Kuri, "that you had better leave well alone. The old nurse will herself keep away from the scene of her villainy, and will probably set up some story of a Jinn haunting the tree. No, I think you couldn't do better than leave the child where he is until something happens. And of course he can have as much milk from me as he needs. Before the dawn breaks I will wander into the forest, as is my custom. Then I will see how things are inside the tree."

While all this was going on, the senior wife and the old nurse had managed to smuggle the sweeper's tenth baby into the cradle of bells. It was indeed a woeful-looking little object, with a large head on a skinny neck. It had a spiteful air, and howled without ceasing.

And this was the first sound the King heard when he returned from his hunting. The senior wife met

him at the head of the stairs. She had put off all her jewels and wore a plain robe of white. With a clutch at his heart he feared something had happened to Lakshmi, but he was assured that she was quite well, only sleepy.

"And the child?" he asked.

The senior wife looked down upon the ground without reply.

"Come, come!" urged the King impatiently; "there must be a child, for I heard it cry."

"Go," said the senior wife, "and look into the silver cradle."

As the King sped away without another word to her, she watched him with a bitter smile. "And I hope you like what you find there," she thought maliciously.

The King burst into Lakshmi's room with heart afire to see his son. Only casting a glance at the quiet figure on the couch, he rushed to the cradle, lifted the velvet coverlet, peered into the shadows where the sweeper's child was squirming, and with a shout of rage turned to Lakshmi.

"Is that you, husband?" she asked in her soft voice, still drowsy from the sleeping draught; but his wrath broke out like a hurricane.

"Infamous woman!" he shouted, for all the Palace folk to hear. "You, who promised me a son with a moon on his forehead, have foisted on me one more like a monkey! Away with you and your jungle brat!"

Dazed, but partially understanding, Lakshmi got up and, although swaying, managed to cross the floor and to look into the cradle. At once the peevish wail

of the foundling stopped, and without a word nor even a look at the King, the unhappy girl lifted the baby in her arms and went slowly with it out of the room . . . out of the Palace . . . and into the night.

The King stood for a moment almost as if turned to stone. And then he fell upon his knees beside the couch, his head upon the silken pillow where Lakshmi's cheek had left a slight dint, and the perfume of her hair still lingered.

Three years went by, and somehow Shankar and Kuri had managed to bring up the little Prince. Bushes and brambles had come to guard the entry to the hollow of the banyan tree, and on love and creamy milk the child had grown strong and healthy.

But one day a huntsman, seeing some movement behind the scrub, pushed the tall grass aside, and saw a beautiful little boy playing with a big dog. He recognised the dog at once, but so great was his surprise that he took to his heels and ran back to the Palace. And there he told one of the grooms, who spread the strange story into the kitchen, from where it passed very quickly to the old nurse, who went as fast as her legs could carry her to find her mistress.

"I told you," said the senior wife, "to destroy the child. Your own head is by no means safe on your shoulders if you have deceived me."

The nurse protested that she had placed the box which contained the little prince deep in the ground and covered it up to the depth of a foot or more.

"He has been protected by the gods," she declared fearfully.

The huntsman was sent for, who asserted that

Shankar—the King's favourite hound—was playing with the child; and it was his opinion that he had become the Prince's protector.

On love and creamy milk the child had grown strong and healthy.

The senior wife gave the man a piece of gold for his story, and bade him hold his tongue, or he might lose it.

But the tale was now all about the Palace. Steps must be taken quickly to rid the forest of both dog and child.

That evening the senior wife showed the King some gashes on her wrist, and a sari torn to shreds and bloodstained.

"I was attacked," she said, "by the dog Shankar. He has evidently gone mad and should be shot."

"What! Shankar, my good friend and companion!" exclaimed the King.

But there was the damage in front of his eyes, and the other wives swore that they were all terrified to go out if the hound was at large. Servants, well paid for their story, spoke of the increasing savagery of Shankar.

"Majesty," said one, "he flew at my little son who had gone to look for a straying fowl in the jungle."

There was nothing for it. The King gave orders for the dog to be shot, but it was with a heavy heart and a feeling of deep foreboding that he did so.

Kuri was just settling down in her stable when Shankar slipped in. The dog was trembling. She much feared something had happened to the child.

"No," replied Shankar, to her anxious question, "the Prince is so far safe. But tomorrow I am to be shot on the King's orders. The senior wife and the others say I have gone mad."

"Then it is a pity you did not bite them all," said Kuri indignantly, "for *they* are both mad and wicked."

"But what is to be done?" asked Shankar; "I don't mind dying at all, for I have had a good life, and I am not so young as I used to be. What distresses me is the thought of who will care for our Prince."

"I will," said Kuri, without hesitation. "You must bring him to me, and I will hide him behind my store of fodder where there is a convenient hole in the wall. It goes a long way back and at the other end leads into a little forgotten garden. It will be a fine place for him. But I'm sorry, Shankar, about you."

"Forget it," replied the dog; "how thankful I am for you, Kuri. You are so wise and so calm. Goodnight, and for the last time—thank you."

Next day Shankar was taken out and shot, but the little Prince slept safely on the soft hay in the hole behind Kuri's fodder. And when day broke he found his way into the secret garden which held all manner of treasures with which he could play.

The time went by until a blundering cowherd, seeing a light coming through the chinks of Kuri's stable when all was dark outside, raised the alarm that dacoits were about to plunder the cattle yard.

The guard turned out at once, but the cowherd got a drubbing for his pains, for all they found was Kuri peacefully chewing the cud but inclined to prod the first intruder with her horns.

The guard went back to gossip, then to snore. But when the story reached the ears of the senior wife she knew in a moment from where the light had come.

"The child still lives," she thought, "and he is protected by the animals. Kuri, the cow, like Shankar, must die."

But it needed all her wicked wit to persuade the King that Kuri was now a great danger to all about her. "The cow is possessed of a demon," she declared; and this, of course, was a very serious accusation. It meant that no servant would attend on the cow, and that her milk might well poison all who drank it.

Kuri was quick to learn of the plot against her life and felt sure that she had not many days to live. She did not mind for herself, but only for the little Prince. But ruminating ceaselessly she decided that she would consult the King's horse Katar, who was credited with magic powers.

He had never been bought by the King, nor was he a gift. As a wild, unbroken colt he had galloped over the wide plain and into the Palace stable-yard. And there he would allow no groom to approach him. But when the King was told of this, he went to the yard himself, and the colt trotted up—docile and trembling.

"This colt I will break in myself," announced the King. "Look at the star on his forehead. It would not surprise me to learn that he had uncommon ancestry."

And the King's opinion held great weight with all. The colt was treated as if he were a royal visitor. His stable was of the finest well-cut stone, lined with cedar-wood, and he was shod in silver. No one but the King ever mounted him, and his grooms were chosen for their sense and horse-knowledge.

But he remained wild and intractable to all but the King, and would not permit any other person to mount him. Kings had offered great sums for him. Bands of dacoits had tried to steal him. But to no avail.

Katar had not yet achieved his purpose. What it was no human being knew. But to Kuri, in her simple wisdom, he was the one creature to whom she dare entrust the princely child. She told Katar all that had happened. and the horse gladly undertook to fill her place. He told her that beneath his stall there was a trap-door. This led into an underground chamber of which none knew but himself. As a rule it was guarded by his heels, for it was with his hind legs that he could lash out so murderously.

"And," said Katar, "the Prince, being of royal birth, may ride me."

"Oh, Katar!" cried Kuri anxiously, "don't let any of the wicked palace-folk see you."

"They won't," replied Katar, "for to all but each other the Prince and I shall be invisible on our midnight rides."

"But the light from the moon on his forehead, and from the star on yours—" began Kuri.

But Katar assured her that he would see to all these things and, most likely, make the Prince's fortune as well. "But not all in the minute," he added, "for we have to await the pleasure of the gods who endowed us. Now, Kuri, die in peace, and I am sure you will be re-born in a shape as beautiful as your nature."

These words put Kuri into a brave and tranquil state of mind. At the dead of night she led the little Prince to his new sanctuary, and because he was born to love and manage horses, he was happy at once with Katar; and as happy as the day was long in the room below the trap-door of the stable.

Above him he could hear the horse stamping with

fury if any groom came too near the secret, and all round him were many strange and beautiful things.

Time went by; and then, on an unlucky day, a groom found the foot-print of a boy marked upon the newly-scoured stone outside Katar's stable. It had been whitened late by a lazy stableman, and remained damp throughout the night. All the grooms came to look at it, and made much talk, which spread to the Palace very soon.

"But the child still lives," cried the senior wife in angry fear.

This time she would find it very hard to dispose of the Prince's protector. Afraid of Katar, yet she went to his stable herself and, in spite of shouts of warning from the grooms, offered him cakes and ghi through the opening of his stall.

But with a scream of rage he bared his yellow teeth, and only a quick leap backwards saved her hand from being chewed to pulp. She fell over a stable bucket, and was bruised in many places. Her nose bled, too, and she looked a pitiable sight.

Just at that moment the King came into the stable-yard to see his favourite. The senior wife, supported between two grooms, set up a great lamentation from behind her heavy veil.

"The horse would have killed me," she sobbed.

"But why are you here at all," asked the King in great displeasure.

"I so wanted to see Katar," she explained; "you often speak of the wonder of him, but you never told me he was so savage."

"I have not found him so," curtly replied the King, but then remembered that he had many complaints

from the grooms, who had told him the horse was dangerous, and that no one would now venture to saddle or bridle him.

"But I can do that," said the King, and approached the horse, who indeed wore the expression of a demon, and for the first time backed away from his master, not allowing the King to get anywhere near him.

And this went on for many days. Until at last, the King—nettled by his failure to control the horse, and worn out by the constant demands from the senior wife and those in her pay—consented that Katar should, like the faithful Shankar, be shot.

"But I myself must fire the fatal bullet," he said with a heavy sigh.

And so it was arranged.

Katar was fully aware of the plot, and when all was quiet he summoned the Prince and said to him, "Listen, my friend! Tomorrow we are going on a journey, for we have been here too long. Tonight we will take our last ride through the forest and over the plains you love, then seek a fairer, finer country than this, in which you will find your fortune."

"As long as we are together, Katar," replied the Prince, "no matter how far we ride."

"We shall be together," said Katar. "Now tomorrow you must saddle and bridle me, and then put on the suit of clothes you will find lying in the room below all ready for you. And by the clothes you will also find a sword and a gun. Both these you must take, for you will have need of them. Take no notice of anything you may see, or hear, when we make our escape tomorrow. It is no part of my plan to make

ourselves invisible, for I wish all here to know we have really gone."

That night, the ride the boy and horse took together was of the most wonderful. At times they seemed almost part of the stars. But next morning all was as usual, except that Katar was given a double feed of oats, and showed himself more tractable.

The morning passed. Black of mood, the King received his gun all primed and loaded. From behind the blinds of reed, the wicked wives watched him go with his guard towards the stables.

"At last," sighed the senior wife in uneasy triumph, "the boy will be truly in our power."

And they waited to hear the shot which was to be their moment of rejoicing.

The King took up his position, so that when the horse bolted out he could take careful aim. The grooms who were to open the stable door were as ready to take to their heels if needs be.

Inside the dark stable, Katar waited, the Prince on his back sitting low, as much a part of his mount as possible, with Katar's splendid mane about him like a cloak of sable.

"Now," cried the King, and raised his gun to his shoulder.

The grooms pulled out the great staple which held the door. It was flung wide open, and through it came Katar like a wave of black with the storm behind it. Swerving, he took a huge leap over the astonished King, and bowling over half a dozen petrified grooms he dashed through the scattering crowd, half braining any who got in his way.

And those who had eyes, saw that upon the back

of the flying horse was a small rider brandishing a sword, and from whom seemed to come more light than the day afforded.

Katar galloped on, until the shouts of the astounded crowd died away into a murmur and then were heard no more. And still he did not slacken speed, leaping every obstacle which came in his path to freedom. But as the night came on he halted near a thick belt of jungle, and here the Prince, absolutely exhausted by the headlong ride, slipped from the saddle to the ground and lay curled up in instant sleep.

A young cobra slid out of its hole and raised an angry hood.

"Now what do you want?" asked Katar, and the snake folded its hood away and made a humble salutation.

"You see the sleeping boy there?" continued Katar, "well, he is under my protection. There are things I shall require for him. First of all, where is there a spring of pure water?"

"Near to my father's palace," replied the snake.

"Oh, and you are a son of King Cobra then," said Katar; "of course, I ought to have known that. I suppose, too, you can supply us with milk and eggs?"

"That I can easily do," replied the snake, and glided off to inform all the dwellers in the jungle that Katar had come.

For a month of thirty days Katar and the Prince rested. There was provision in plenty, for all the animals had brought something of their daily food.

But when Katar thought the time ripe, he said to the Prince, "Tomorrow we must move on. We are

still in your father's dominions, in which—so long as those wicked women live—you are never really safe."

Then the Prince asked Katar an unexpected question, "My own mother—what of her?"

"We will talk of that later on," replied Katar.

"She was a gardener's daughter, wasn't she?" enquired the Prince.

"She was very much more than that," said Katar shortly. Then added, "How do you suppose you came by the moon on your forehead? You didn't inherit that from a man who grew pumpkins."

The Prince fell silent. He had a great deal to think about.

Next day they left the friendly place and all the charitable creatures. Refreshed, Katar made the most wonderful pace, so that within twelve hours the domes and minarets of a royal city showed on the far horizon. They were on an open plain bounded on all sides by scrub and high grass.

"Here I shall stay," said Katar decidedly, and he stood stock still.

"And I shall stay here too then," declared the Prince.

"Oh no you won't" said Katar, "you will walk on towards the city. But first you must take off your princely dress, leave your sword and gun with them, and put on the clothes you will find in my saddle-bag. But until morning you shall rest, and I will tell you stories."

At sunrise, Katar awakened the Prince and reminded him of the next progress.

The clothes in the saddle-bag were a well-worn pair of workmen's dungarees. There was a little

round cap, too, and a cotton square like those in which coolies carry their day's food.

"And now," said Katar, when the Prince had put on these things, "you are ready to go and seek your fortune in yonder city."

But the Prince showed much distress. "How can I, who know nothing of the world, manage without you, dear Katar?"

"I shall be here," replied Katar, "not so far away at all. If you get into any real difficulties you can easily come and ask me to help you out of them."

And with that the Prince had to be content, and he left Katar grazing on the rough grass contentedly and looking like any other horse who has been long out in wind and weather.

But just as he was getting out of ear-shot, too heavy of heart even to look back to wave to his faithful friend, Katar called after him, "No one will be able to see the moon on your forehead until the right time comes."

As the Prince entered the city, looking poor and woebegone, he met a man who asked him whence he came. The Prince waved his hand behind him, as if to show the direction. Then the man asked him if he had any business in the royal city, and the Prince told him that he was seeking work there

"Work? I can give you work," replied the man; "I am the Sultan's grain-merchant and always short of likely lads, because as soon as I train them to my liking they take service at the Palace with the grooms."

"If you employ me I will not do that," said the Prince.

And as he seemed willing, and looked honest, the

grain-merchant took him on, giving him a hole of a room to sleep in, hot and airless. And the Prince was very unhappy and could not think why he was there at all.

Now the grain-merchant's store backed upon the wall of the Palace and, from where he slept, the Prince could hear the sound of the many fountains in the Sultan's garden. He longed to sit near the water and to feel soft grass under his bare feet.

And so one night—even hotter than usual—he slipped out of his room and, greatly daring, scaled the Palace wall. At once he thought himself in Paradise. By the faint light of the moon he could see the great stone lions which guarded the marble steps that led up to the door of a splendid building. Not a light showed in any window; not a sound broke the silence; the guards were all asleep on the other side of the Palace. Seeking the shadow of one of the stone lions, the Prince threw himself down on the grass and began very softly to sing.

His song was very beautiful. The sound of it rose to the ears of the Sultan's youngest daughter who, also unable to sleep, was leaning over the balcony of her turret room high up in the Palace.

She was sixteen and unmarried, but of such surpassing beauty that the Sultan had constant demands for her hand. But because her sisters had all married to please him, and were none of them happy, he had decided to let this one make her own choice. She was in no hurry to do so. But as the song came to her ears, it turned her heart to the singer, and she went down flight by flight of marble stairs—moving more softly than the night wind which hardly stirred her curtains.

Pausing on the last flight of steps, she peered over the tail of one of the stone lions. And there she could just see a form, long and graceful—that of the singer.

"Who are you?" she asked. And then, as there was no reply, she said a little louder, "Who are you, and where do you come from?"

At once the figure rose, and sped like a hare across the grass. But like a man it climbed the wall, and dropped over the other side. Disappointed, the Princess went back to her turret room, and slept but badly.

But the Prince, startled by his adventure, went as soon as his work was done to tell Katar all about it. The beauty of the Palace garden had enchanted him, and even more so the voice of the Princess. But who was he—the grain-merchant's servant—even to think of these things?

Katar greeted him joyfully. "Are you well and happy?" he asked at once.

"I am well, but I am not happy," replied the Prince moodily. "Last night I trespassed in the Sultan's garden, and something made me begin to sing. That brought a girl down out of the Palace, and she asked me who I was and where I came from. I thought I had better take flight. I wonder what she thought about me."

"Who can tell what a girl thinks," replied Katar. "It would be the Sultan's youngest daughter. She is allowed to do just as she chooses. Her six sisters were all married off to please the Sultan. They are miserable and complain unceasingly of their husbands."

"There was very little light, and so I could not see her face," regretted the Prince.

"Perhaps for your peace of mind it is just as well you did not," replied Katar, "for she is said to be the most beautiful princess in the world. However, I see no reason why you should not go again to the Palace garden and finish your song."

As this was just what the Prince wanted to do, he took Katar's advice, and that night climbed over the wall again and, seeking the shadow of the stone lion, sang even more charmingly than before. Again the Princess came down; again he fled from her questions. This happened for three more nights.

On the morning after the last, the Princess went to the Sultan and said, "Father, I want to be married."

The Sultan was delighted, and at once sent out invitations to all the petty kings, princes, and highly placed nobles in his dominions. And each one hurried to his Palace with joy, hoping that he would be the choice of the Princess.

When all was ready, she came—riding on a snow white elephant, and wearing a long chain of gold around her slender neck. Twice the elephant paced in stately fashion inside the ring of suitors, each one of whom bowed his head hoping the chain of choice would be his.

A large and excited crowd watched the tamasha,[1] waiting to applaud the lucky man. And with the crowd—quite near to the ring of suitors—stood the Prince in his humble dress.

Twice the Princess rode round the ring, and more than once her fingers played with the golden chain, but the elephant paced on until, level with the Prince, the royal beast went on its knees, and the Princess

[1] Fine show, popular entertainment : (tamāsha).

bent from the howdah conferring the chain of choice on what appeared to be a dusty workman.

The elephant rose, and resumed its progress until it arrived at the great door of the Palace. Here the Princess dismounted, and in a whirl of sound from the excited crowd, disappeared inside.

"I cannot say but what I am disappointed," said the Sultan to his daughter when they were alone; "that you should deign to throw the golden chain of choice round the neck of a common man has come as a great shock to me. Do you propose to live in a workman's hovel, and every day grind the meal?"

"I shall not mind at all, father," replied the Princess blithely, "for something tells me that I shall be happy with that common man."

But the Prince had gone, almost on wings, to tell Katar of his good great fortune.

"It is not more than I expected," said Katar calmly. "That Princess has the discerning eye. She knows very well that you are not what you look. Nor shall you be. We will return to the royal city in a manner befitting your rank. Come, put on your princely garments; pick up your sword and gun. Then mount me, and I guarantee that never such a horse or rider came to claim a royal bride!"

And as Katar carried the Prince into the Palace Courtyard, trumpets blared and drums resounded.

"I think," said the youngest Princess modestly, "the bridegroom has come."

The Sultan himself went down the marble steps to receive homage. The Prince dismounted, and kissed the hilt of the Sultan's scimitar. Katar stood proudly by.

"That is a fine horse of yours, son-in-law," said the Sultan, eyeing Katar greedily.

"And my protector and friend," replied the Prince sincerely.

"Perhaps you will now tell me a little about your lineage," said the Sultan, a little uneasy at the thought that this son-in-law of his might be not altogether human.

"I am a king's son," replied the Prince, quite truthfully, "but my mother was—"

"Descended from the gods," put in Katar quietly.

"The horse speaks!" cried the Sultan, and fell back a little.

"He does what he likes," replied the Prince, without further explanation.

As soon as the preparations could be made, the wedding of the Prince and the Sultan's daughter took place, and after a little time had passed, Katar—who remained with them—suggested that it was time that the newly wedded pair made a visit to the Prince's parents.

"But my mother—" began the Prince.

"Oh, dear husband," said his wife, "I shall never rest until I have seen her. My father will provide a royal escort, so that we may arrive in your country as befits our rank."

"No, dear heart," the Prince said gently; "if you are not afraid to ride with me, and unattended, I would wish that Katar should take us to my home."

"Could he carry us both?" asked the Princess.

"He could carry the whole world," was the answer.

And so the two set off on their romantic journey.

In less time than the crow flies, they were at the

end of it, the Princess looking very lovely, her green robe and head-dress barred with gold, her long black hair sweeping down to Katar's sides. In front, the Prince sat proudly, his hand upon the silken rein. Two birds of good omen flew before and behind the royal pair. And the King, with all his retinue, came out to meet them.

"Things are now as they should be," said Katar sagely, "except that your mother, Prince, should have come to meet you too."

"I think," said the Prince, "that it is my part to reinstate her."

And after a few words of greeting to his father he said, very bluntly, "But the Princess and I have ridden thus far to do honour to my mother. Pray lead us to her."

The King was much embarrassed, but Katar said, "She is in the Palace kitchen where she minds the fire."

"We will go there," said the Prince.

And without any more ceremony he rode off and, skirting the front of the Palace, entered the yard behind.

"Ho, there!" he cried.

A mob of scullions rushed out. Then came the head cook, and a mob of pantry-boys and pages.

"I seek the Queen," demanded the Prince, his hand on his sword.

"We have no queen here," screeched a woman.

"Mother!" called the Prince.

There was a dead silence, and Katar stamped with his silver shoes on the flag-stones of the yard.

"Shall I go and look for your mother?" whispered the little Princess, tears in her eyes.

"I think she will answer my voice," whispered back the Prince, and waited.

Then from the dark doorway crept a tiny woman clad in the robes of a servant, but about her there was a kind of radiance. The Prince dismounted and helped his bride down.

"We will do her reverence," he said, and they knelt before the humble figure who, placing a hand on each bent head, gave them her blessing.

"You must come away with us," said the Prince.

"We will do all we can to make you happy," added the bride.

But now the King had come with all his followers, and he, repenting of his former folly, warmly acknowledged the mother of his son.

"But," said he, "now that we have had this happy reunion, I wish you, my son, to remain here and, as my heir, take on some of the duties of kingship."

The Prince looked at his father, and then replied, "Sire, six months will we spend in my wife's country, and six months in my own; but the last only if you promise to get rid of those cruel women, who sought first to destroy my mother, and then me."

"But," said the King, "I have already done so. They were all sent back to their own people in disgrace. Old, and without royal rank, they will be well punished for their sins—they who had used their power so badly."

And so all was settled happily. The King took the gardener's daughter back as his chief Queen. He knew now that she had been re-born, so that he might choose her for her virtue and make her the mother of his son.

His work done, Katar had a great desire to return to his heaven from where, in an animal form, he had descended to right the wrong.

"Do not leave me," cried the Prince.

"Stay with us," pleaded the lovely bride.

Katar looked at the Prince, and then said gently, "O boy with the moon on your forehead, I shall never be far away."

And at that moment, the light blazed out and all around the Prince, bathing his mother in a cloak of shimmering silver.

Based upon a Panjab Legend with the Vedic origin of Aswa, the celestial horse, who descends to help "chosen mortals".

VII

The Lizard's Tail

One night when the moon shone brightly in the sky, a hungry Jackal went howling down the village street looking for food. But he found nothing except a pair of old shoes, which were too tough even for him to eat.

Then a bright idea struck him, and he said to himself, "I cannot make a meal of these shoes, but they will make a very handsome pair of ear-rings. With one in each ear I shall look like a Rajah. But of course, to do that I must also have a throne. How can I make a throne? I know! I'll get some bones. There are plenty by the river. And I'll pile them up, then plaster them over with mud. What a fine throne I shall have, to be sure!"

So the Jackal went down to the river and collected a lot of bones. Some of these he laid lengthways and some crossways, and in this fashion made so high a seat that he had some difficulty in climbing on to it.

He had not sat upon it very long when an old Buffalo came down to the river to drink, and the Jackal hailed him loudly.

"What do you mean by coming down to the river to drink without first paying your respects to me?"

The Buffalo turned his great head, and stared at the Jackal out of his dim eyes.

"For years I have taken my evening drink here without paying anything to anyone," he grunted.

The Jackal took on a haughty air. "All that is changed now," he said, "for I am the new Rajah. Look at my ear-rings! Look at my fine throne! Don't you recognise a person of rank when you see one? Stupid creature! Not a drop shall you drink until you have said a verse which I myself have composed in my own honour!"

And the Jackal howled and whined out the rhyme:

"Precious ear-rings, throne of gold,
A great Rajah I behold."

"It sounds nonsense to me," said the Buffalo, "but I can't stay here all night arguing. I'm thirsty, so here goes:

Precious ear-rings, throne of gold,
A great Rajah I behold."

The Jackal was delighted. "You recited that very nicely," he said graciously. "Now go and have your drink. Here comes the Bear! Hello! Hello! I say, Balu, you can't pass here without paying your respects to me."

"You silly fellow," growled the Bear, "what are you up to now? If this is a joke, it's a bad one."

"A joke! A joke!" yapped the Jackal indignantly. "Can't you see my ear-rings? Look at my beautiful throne. I am the new Rajah of this place, and you must do me honour by saying these lines before you drink:

'Precious ear-rings, throne of gold,
A great Rajah I behold.' "

"Ho, ho, ho!" jeered the Bear; "I don't see any ear-rings, only an old pair of shoes. I don't see a throne, but just a heap of bones smeared with mud. I don't even see a Rajah, only a silly vain Jackal! However, I'll repeat your rhyme as I can't stay here all night listening to your folly:

'Precious ear-rings, throne of gold,
A great Rajah I behold.'"

The Jackal puffed himself out with pride. "Now you may drink your fill," he said in his most condescending tones, "but be quick, for here comes the Elephant, and he does not much care for the way you muddy the water with your clumsy paws. Good-evening, Elephant! Pause to pay your respects to the new Rajah."

The Elephant lifted his trunk, and trumpeted with disdain.

"If lifting you off that pile of rubbish and ducking you in the river are my 'respects', I am ready to oblige you," he replied.

The Jackal eyed him warily. "Do not be so hasty," he begged, "but wait for me to explain. I am the new Rajah, and everyone who comes to drink at the river must repeat this little rhyme:

'Precious ear-rings, throne of gold,
A great Rajah I behold.'"

The Elephant's great form shook with mirth. "'Precious ear-rings, throne of gold, A great Rajah I behold.' . . . Of all the nonsense!" he said, thrusting his long trunk into the water.

The Jackal sighed. "You certainly do not recite so

nicely as the Buffalo," he complained; "maybe your trunk got in the way, or something. However, hurry up with your drink, for I see the Tiger coming along, and I want a word with him. Good-evening, Tiger! As you see, I am the Rajah of this place, and must ask you to observe a little ceremony as the other animals have done. It is quite simple. You have only to say:

'Precious ear-rings, throne of gold,
A great Rajah I behold.'"

"Is that all?" replied the Tiger, very much amused. "For a moment I feared you were going to eat me. I'll say your little rhyme with pleasure, though I'm not very good at poetry. I wish my wife had come with me—she recites beautifully. However—

'Precious ear-rings, throne of gold,
A great Rajah I behold.'

How's that?"

"Not bad at all," said the Jackal, "so pass on and have your drink."

The Jackal was too foolish to see that the Tiger was making fun of him, but became even more puffed up with pride and made plans to tease and bully every animal that came down to the river to drink.

Presently a large Lizard crawled slowly towards the river, looking so like a crocodile in the moonlight that the Jackal's voice trembled a little as he called out, "Look at me! I am the new Rajah of this place. You must say a rhyme in my honour before you take your drink. It is not difficult, just this:

'Precious ear-rings, throne of gold,
A great Rajah I behold.'"

The Lizard stared at the Jackal as if in the deepest admiration.

"Why!" he exclaimed, "it's the most beautiful verse I've ever heard. What a poet you are, as well as a Rajah! But my throat is so dry this hot weather that I must have a sip of water before I attempt to recite. I would not spoil your composition for the world. You can hear how hoarse I am, but it will pass when I have had a drink."

"Of course," agreed the Jackal; and added in a gratified way, "It is easy to see you are a creature of taste and refinement. All the other animals gabbled my lines as if they were an everyday affair. I flatter myself that they are poetry as well as being true."

The Lizard gave a flip of his tail, and went down to to the river where he had the longest drink he could remember. The Jackal began to be afraid that he would burst before he had said the verse.

"Hi!" he called out. "You'll go pop if you take in any more. You can't be as hoarse as all that."

"Oh, can't I!" gurgled the Lizard. "But another drink will put me all right."

So he put his nose into the water again and swallowed simply gallons, until the Jackal began to fear he'd drain the river dry. However, at last he raised his snout out of the water, and began to waddle off without saying one word of the Jackal's verse.

"Come back!" howled the Jackal. "You've forgotten something."

"I've quite forgotten your poetry, but it doesn't matter," replied the Lizard.

"Oh, doesn't it?" said the Jackal angrily. "Well,

you just come here and say every word, or I'll take care you never see your hole again."

"I'm still very hoarse!" protested the Lizard. "I shall make a dreadful mess of it."

"Never mind! I'll prompt you. Now begin!" commanded the Jackal, and to help the Lizard, said the first few words: "Precious ear-rings, throne of . . ."

"Yes, yes!" broke in the Lizard, "now I remember it all—

'Bones and mud, a vain Jackal,
Two old shoes, and that is all.'"

And off the Lizard went, at top speed for him, before the Jackal could recover from such impudence. But when he *did*, he lost no time, and as the Lizard gained his hole the Jackal was just behind him and seized him by the tail.

"Oh, I say! Be careful! That's my tail!" squeaked the Lizard.

"I know it is!" retorted the Jackal, in a tearing temper, "and I'll drag you out of your hole, then pound you to a jelly for singing that insulting rubbish about me."

"I want to go down my hole," said the Lizard, tugging at his tail.

"I dare say you do!" snarled the Jackal, keeping a firm grip, "and what's more, I'm going to hold on even if all my front teeth come out, you miserable reptile, you!"

"Won't you be very uncomfortable without your teeth?" enquired the Lizard, almost politely.

"Not more uncomfortable than you will be without your tail," mumbled the Jackal.

"My tail? Oh, I don't set any value on my tail," said the Lizard. "It often comes off, and grows again quite nicely—indeed, it's usually twice as strong as before."

"Well, we'll see." The Jackal gulped in a bit more of the Lizard's tail as he spoke.

"I can't hear what you're saying. Your mouth is so full of my tail," complained the Lizard. "Look here! Let go, and I'll be able to turn round and come out to talk things over."

So the Jackal let go, and as he did so the Lizard bolted down his hole into safety, and the Jackal could hear him singing:

"'Bones and mud, a vain Jackal,
Two old shoes and that is al–l–l–l.'"

Original collected by Flora Annie Steel, in the Punjab, 1884.

VIII

The False Fakir

ONCE, long ago, there came to a city in Northern India, a wandering Fakir, who took up his abode at the foot of a great banyan-tree[1] which grew just outside the Palace walls. And there—seemingly lost in meditation—he sat, hour after hour, day after day, quite motionless, and taking neither food nor drink.

He was, in his appearance, different from most fakirs who appeared from time to time in the royal city. These were usually ancient men, with long unkempt hair and beards, wearing (if anything but a loin-cloth) garments so ragged and dirty that they looked as if they would drop off from sheer decay.

But this Fakir was neatly clad in faded blue cotton, and his long silky black beard and hair were curled and well tended. He wore upon his arm a strange bracelet of iron, and—well concealed—he carried a little steel knife, something like a dagger. For although now he appeared to be a holy man, he had once been a fighting Sikh.

The fame of his ceaseless prayer and fasting soon spread, and every day the neighbourhood of the

[1] (Pron. bunyun) the common Indian fig-tree, whose branches root themselves, so that one tree can look like a grove.

banyan-tree was thronged with people eager to get the Fakir's blessing—if he was in the mood to speak. At any rate, they congregated to stare at him, and watch his lips move in prayer.

Word of his fame soon came to the Rajah's ear, who made haste to pay the holy man a ceremonial visit. After welcoming him to the city, he asked the Fakir's prayers that the Rani might have a son, for—so far—the royal pair had only one child, a daughter, now fifteen years old.

This Princess, who was extremely beautiful, had been betrothed—as was the custom of the country—while yet a child, and in a year's time would wed the son and heir of a neighbouring king. But until this time came, she was kept in the strict seclusion of the Zenana, and was not permitted to walk in the Palace gardens without a guard.

But although he had a lovely daughter, the Rajah craved the gift of a son—one who would succeed him, and rule where his father had ruled. And the idea came to him that if he had all the Fakir's prayers to himself, he was more likely to gain his greatest wish.

And so he had a little shrine built within the Palace walls which was approached through a grove of sacred sal trees, and had a high wall all round. When this choice hermitage was ready, he begged the Fakir to remove himself out of the dust which gathered daily round the foot of the banyan tree, and become the honoured guest of royalty for as long as he was contented to remain.

The Fakir accepted the Rajah's offer very graciously, only asking that he might take a few pupils to instruct

in religious arts; and these young men—when not sitting at the foot of their guru[1]—supplied his small daily wants.

There was much talk about the wonderful Fakir in the Zenana, and the Princess, who was young and often felt very dull, fervently desired to see this holy wonder. If he were a bit of a wizard, as well as a bit of a saint, he might be able to conjure up for her the person of the Prince she was soon to marry. It would be nice to get just a peep into the future.

But was she—so carefully guarded—ever to get out alone?

However, by bribing her ayah with a golden bracelet, she managed one moonlit night to slip out, and creeping along in the shadow of the oleander bushes whose heady scent filled the night air, she came to the little shrine, and went in.

There sat the Fakir, his dark eyes glowing, but his lips not moving in prayer. Alas, at the sight of so much beauty, he forgot all his vows and, throwing himself at the feet of the Princess, spoke violently of love. But she, shocked and horrified, drew her gauze veil around her, and with the fleetness of a deer fled from that sinister place.

Off his guard, the Fakir reached his feet too late, and seeing that he could not catch her drew his little steel knife and hurled it javelin-wise at the escaping girl.

It struck her in the leg, but hardly heeding the pain she stooped and, plucking out the knife, cast it from her, racing on until she reached the steps of the Zenana, and at last her own room. There she bathed

[1] Religious teacher.

and bandaged her wound, and when the ayah waddled upstairs she found her mistress in bed and apparently asleep.

But all that night the Fakir tossed on his hard couch, planning revenge against the girl who had flouted him. Gone was all his holiness. Vanished the years of self-denial and self-control. He felt like an angry, raging beast—except that he had the cunning of a man to plot the destruction of the Princess.

Who was she to seek him out, and then disdain him—the chosen counsellor of royalty, the favourite of a king? He writhed at the thought of her marriage to a young and charming prince. As dawn broke, he had worked out the scheme of revenge.

When the Rajah came to visit the Fakir as usual, he found that his holy man would neither speak to nor look at him. Quaking in his golden shoes, which he then removed, he advanced a little further into the hermit's shrine. But still the Fakir sat like an image of stone.

"Whatever is the matter?" asked the Rajah piteously. "What can I have done to offend you, holy man?"

Still the Fakir sat on in stubborn silence, and the Rajah began again. "Only yesterday we talked of many things, and I drank again from the fount of your deep wisdom. Today you will not even grant me one word!"

"I have nothing to say you would care to hear," replied the Fakir harshly.

"But surely you know," pleaded the Rajah, "that every word which falls from your exalted lips is as music in my ears."

The Fakir had fallen silent again, and now turned his back upon the Rajah who once more pressed him to explain the great change which had come over him.

The Fakir gave the Rajah a mysterious look. "I would rather leave you in ignorance of what has become known to me during the night," he said at last.

The Rajah grew pale. "I come to you for counsel and help," he said, "and now you only hint at some terrible knowledge which I am sure bodes ill for me and mine."

"It does indeed," replied the Fakir, in dark and gloomy tones.

"Surely I ought to share this knowledge, so that I can—by your help—meet any dire calamity approaching," gasped the Rajah.

"My son!" said the Fakir. "In this city there dwells an evil spirit which, if it gains in power, will destroy every living thing in your domain."

"But how do you know? I mean, solitary in prayer here, what influence could such an evil thing have on *you*, O saintly one?" asked the Rajah.

The Fakir folded his hands as if in prayer. "Last night, when deep in my devotions, I was visited by this thing—this dreadful thing!" he replied at last.

"In what shape did it come?" twittered the Rajah, almost speechless with fear.

"I shall surprise you," replied the Fakir, "for it might be expected that anything so evil would display some horrible form. But not at all! When sunk in contemplation, a light sound disturbed me. I looked up. A lovely, innocent girl stood between me and the dcors of the shrine. But as I looked on that face—fair as that of an angel—it changed suddenly, and I was

confronted by a vengeful beast; and were I not what I am, it might then and there have consumed me—as it will all who come in its way."

The Rajah was chilled to the bone. "How can one recognise this evil thing which shows itself in the guise of beauty?" he implored.

The Fakir looked at him keenly. He saw a weak and fear-stricken man in the dress of royalty.

"Search," he said, "for a girl so lovely that she defies description. How can you suspect her? By the wound on her leg. Then secure her safely, and come to me. I will advise you what to do."

Away went the Rajah to issue an edict that every girl in the country must be willing to have her legs examined. But no one was found to have a wound until it came to the turn of the Princess, who could no longer conceal her injury.

Greatly agitated, the Rajah hurried off to acquaint the Fakir with this bad news, saying that there must be some mistake.

But the Fakir was quite ready. "For years you think you have brought up your daughter to the high destiny of being a prince's bride. But alas, Rajah, how you have been deceived! Your true daughter was stolen away soon after her birth, and this lovely fraud you have nourished is but an evil form in her shape. You can do what you like, of course, but I warn you that if you leave this fiend at large she will destroy you all!"

The Rajah, by now accustomed to taking the Fakir's advice on everything, was quite prepared to believe his fearful story, and so he declared himself ready to follow any course the Fakir advised.

"We must secure the fiend," said the Fakir firmly. "Send me two carpenters!"

And the Rajah—at his wits' end—did exactly as he was told.

The Fakir, who always managed to seem in the right, ordered the carpenters to make a great chest—one which neither air, nor water, could penetrate. And as these were royal carpenters and very skilled, they contrived this so cunningly that even the Fakir was completely satisfied. There it stood, the huge chest, almost blocking up the whole of the holy shrine.

Then, as the Fakir had commanded him, the Rajah brought the poor little Princess—more lovely than ever in her fear and distress—and between them, they thrust her in. The chest was secured with great iron nails, and finally set floating on the river.

As soon as the Fakir had accomplished this dreadful deed and got rid of the terrified Rajah, he called two of his pupils and spun them a strange yarn about a revelation he had been shown . . . how a chest containing great treasure would come bobbing down the stream below the city. They must watch out for it, even if it came into sight as far away as the neighbouring country, and at all costs they were to seize the chest and get it conveyed back to the Fakir's shrine.

For now, so terrible was the Fakir's thirst for vengeance, that if the little Princess proved to be still alive in the airless chest, he would not spare her.

The pupils wandered off, wondering much at the strangeness of their errand, and still more at the power and holiness of the Fakir to whom such secrets were revealed. But being young, and hungry, they first had a meal, and then fell sound asleep.

And still the great chest went bob-bobbing down the river, and still the pupils snored on.

Now a young Prince, hunting on the borders of his father's dominions with a great company of courtiers and huntsmen, was following a white deer. The sun was not yet up, but the scent was keen and led to the river. Once, twice, the Prince raised his bow. Once, twice, he missed his quarry by a hair's-breadth. Up to the very water's edge he rode, and his company behind him.

"She takes to the middle of the stream!" cried a huntsman.

The Prince saw something bobbing up and down, but it was no white deer, just a great chest, twisting and turning on the tide.

The Prince, filled with curiosity, shouted an order to seize the chest, and several huntsmen waded in and dragged the strange thing to shore.

"Be on your guard with drawn swords!" commanded the Prince, and was the first to use his dagger to force open the lid. And there within the chest, lay the most lovely maiden his eyes had ever rested on.

Although half-swooning and almost stifled, the Princess soon revived, and when she was able to speak the Prince asked her who she was, and how she came to be entombed in the chest.

She told her story very simply and without bitterness. Her father, she said, was in the power of an evil creature who, posing as a holy Fakir, had worked his wicked will. But she did not mention her own folly in visiting the little shrine, or her flight from the false Fakir.

"I think," said the Prince, looking at her with so

much love and admiration that she half hid her face in her veil, "I think you must be my affianced bride. And as your father, the Rajah, is not fit to look after you, it will be better if we are married straight away." Turning to his suite, he bade a messenger go quickly for the family priest . . . "For," said he, very sweetly, "as my bride has come to me by river, our wedding shall take place on the river bank."

And married they were, there and then; and the Prince took his lovely Princess home to his parents, who welcomed her right royally, with much feasting and rejoicing.

But when the wedding was over, the bride told her husband of the fate which the Fakir had reserved for her should she come into his hands alive after her voyage in the chest. And she confessed to her visit to the wicked Fakir, from which all the trouble had come.

Then the Prince called his chief Minister to him, and said, "On the river bank there still lies the great chest from which our beloved Princess was rescued. I wish you to replace her by the old monkey whom we keep chained up in the Palace yard. Place food for the brute. Put him in savage. Then nail up the chest, cart it to a point above the Fakir's shrine, and put it into the river."

The Minister, only too delighted to be entrusted with such a lively job, had the monkey—jibbering and clawing—thrust into the chest, which was then nailed up, and carted away. Then he, with a party of the Prince's servants, ran along the bank until they spied two gaunt-looking students peeping and peering on the water's edge. For the Fakir's pupils had awakened, and were watching for the treasure

chest, hoping that they too might benefit from what it contained.

So, with much joy and all the strength they had,

" I think you must be my

they managed to secure the chest with two long poles and brought it into shore. Between them they hauled and dragged it to the Fakir's shrine, where he waited gloatingly for his act of vengeance.

The pupils hung about, still hoping to share the treasure, but the Fakir ordered them away, saying sternly, "This is no matter for weaklings. I, alone, will

affianced bride," said the Prince.

wrestle with the contents of the chest. No matter if you hear shrieks and cries. Be sure I can overcome all evil."

Mystified, the pupils slunk away, closing the doors of the little shrine behind them. They had been told

the chest contained treasure, but it was not for them to question the Master. Wondering greatly, they sat down outside the shrine. And suddenly their ears were almost slit by the most bloodcurdling yells. But they dared not enter, for had they not been told to stay away whatever sounds they heard?

The din grew frightful. The young men's hair rose on their skulls. They clutched each other in terror. One last awful shriek, some angry growls and grunts, then a stillness which was almost the worst of all. For quite a long time they waited, then at last summoned enough courage to open the doors of the shrine.

As they did so, a great monkey came leaping out, and with strange cries dashed past them and over the Palace walls on its way to freedom in the trackless jungle. Only then did they dare to look into the shrine, immediately turning their faces quickly away from all that was left of the false Fakir, and—like the monkey—making their escape over the Palace walls.

Very soon the story spread and came to the ears of the Princess and her husband, and she—knowing that she no longer had anything to fear—made peace with her father.

IX

The Mouse's Bride

A FARMER and his wife had no children . . . but one year, in the season of ploughing, a strange thing happened to them.

Each evening as he came to the end of his day's work, the Farmer would lean on his plough and lament aloud, "My neighbours all have sons who will plough their fields when they are old and feeble. But I have none. What will become of my land? Oh, if I only had a son! Oh, that a son would fall down from the sky!"

One evening—when he was saying this as usual—a hawk flew over his head, and wondering, I suppose, to hear an old man talking to himself, he spread his claws in surprise, and out there dropped a mouse . . . a little mouse, a boy-mouse. And he fell at the feet of the Farmer.

The Farmer picked him up, saying, "Where have you come from?"

"Out of the sky, sir," replied the Mouse simply.

"Will you come home with me?" asked the Farmer.

"Yes, sir, if you like," agreed the Mouse.

"Will you learn to plough and sow and reap?" continued the Farmer.

"My goodness, I can do that already!" squeaked the Mouse, very much amused.

So the Farmer carried him home, and set him down on the table. But when the Farmer's wife came in from the yard, she gave a piercing shriek.

"Look, husband, look!" she cried, clutching her sari around her. "Look, there's a mouse on the table!"

"That is our son," explained the Farmer gravely.

"A mouse! Our son!" exclaimed the wife.

For a moment she thought her husband had been out in the sun too long, and was raving.

"This little fellow dropped out of the sky," said the Farmer.

But the Mouse was very frightened. "Why is she shrieking?" he asked piteously.

"I do not know," replied the Farmer. "She was not expecting you—yes, that is it, she's taken by surprise. Enough!" he said to his wife, and gave her a shake to steady her.

But now she was really looking at the Mouse, and suddenly she smiled.

"Why, husband, you are right," she said; "yes, yes, it is our son."

And she hugged the boy-mouse and gave him food, then put him to bed. And in the morning she made him a little red coat, and he strode off into the fields with his newly-found father.

It was quite true what he had said, that he could plough and sow and reap. Very well he did it—some days better than the Farmer himself. Nothing could tire him. All day long he worked, ploughing late into the evening, his paws clenched on the handles of the plough, his face set in a frown, and his whiskers gleaming red with the setting sun.

Then the Farmer would call to him, "Come on, my dear, come home. Look how late it is."

The Mouse looked up at the sky, then answered steadily, "I can still see to plough, Father."

"But, look, all my neighbours' sons have gone home to supper," said the Farmer.

"Have they all gone?" The Mouse looked round as he spoke. "Are the fields quite empty?"

"There's Rama in the next field, just packing up," was the reply.

"I shall plough until he has gone." And the Mouse gripped the handles of the plough, to show that he meant what he said.

"Don't tire yourself, my son." The Farmer spoke kindly, for he had grown to love his adopted son very deeply.

"I am a strong mouse," said the little creature.

Not until the fields were empty would he stop work, and when he got home he would be merry and sing to please his parents.

The Farmer was so proud of him; he thought there was no better son on earth. But after a time the little animal was no longer merry, he sang no more; and though he ploughed as well and as long as ever, he was a different mouse when he came home at night.

Then the Farmer was grieved, but his wife—who knew other things than ploughing—took a measure, and when the mouse was asleep, measured the length of his tail.

"Why are you doing that?" asked the Farmer.

"Hush!" replied his wife; "hush, and I will tell you. Seven inches—seven inches exactly. What's three times seven, husband?"

The Farmer thought for a moment. "Three sevens? Hmph! . . . three sevens are twenty-one."

The Farmer's wife gave a delighted nod.

"Yes, yes, I thought so!" she whispered.

"What did you think?" the Farmer whispered back.

"Our little boy-mouse has become a man," she replied softly.

"A man!" echoed the Farmer. "But why is he sad?"

His wife put the measure away.

"He is sad, husband, because he needs a wife," she said, and she looked tenderly at the sleeping mouse, who gave a tiny sigh as he snuggled in more cosily.

"If it's a wife he wants, I'll go and find him one," said the Farmer stoutly.

"Yes, tomorrow," agreed the woman. "But mind you, husband, she must be the best wife in the world to be worthy of our wonderful son."

The Farmer moved off towards the fire. "She must be like him, neither better nor worse," he grunted.

And so the very next day, the little man-mouse in his red coat, and the Farmer, his adopted father, set out to look for a wife. And all day long they searched and found no one. As the sun set, they sat down on a stone; the farmer was quite worn out, and even the Mouse was beginning to yawn.

Suddenly, the Moon stepped up into the sky, dazzling the Farmer with her beauty.

"Look, look, my son!" he cried. "There is a wife worthy of you. What do you think of her?"

The Mouse looked up at the Moon until he blinked. She was bright, she was radiant, but he did not much care for her.

So he turned to the Farmer, and said, "True, she is very beautiful, Father, but she is so cold and proud."

"Yes, I am cold," scoffed the Moon; "I am proud. I am not for you."

The Farmer got up and made a deep salaam. "Tell me, my Lady Moon, is there none better than you?"

"Oh yes," replied the Moon, "there is the Cloud. When she covers me with her mantle I am invisible. She is better than I."

At that moment a cloud slipped over the Moon, and hid her from sight.

"Look, look, my son!" said the Farmer. "There is a wife worthy of you. What do you think of her?"

"She is very fine," agreed the Mouse, "but she's sad and gloomy."

"Yes, I am gloomy," mourned the Cloud. "I am not for you."

"Tell me, Lady Cloud," said the Farmer, "is there none better than you?"

"Oh, yes!" replied the Cloud, "there is the Wind. She drives me all round the sky. She is better than I."

And at once the Wind blew hard, and scattered the Cloud.

And now the Farmer thought he had found a fine wife for the Mouse, and said, "The Wind now! She's just the one for you. What do you think of her?"

The Mouse shivered. "She sets my whiskers a-flutter, father, but she fidgets so," he complained.

"Yes, I am restless," whistled the Wind. "I am not for you."

"Tell me Lady Wind," said the Farmer, "is there none better than you?"

"The Mountain," replied the Wind promptly. "She is far better than I, for although I storm, I cannot move her."

And the Farmer and the Mouse turned round, and saw that they were sitting at the foot of a mighty mountain.

"There!" exclaimed the Farmer with relief. "At last we have found a wife worthy of you. Now what do you think of her?"

"She is very noble, father, but I think she would be obstinate," replied the Mouse.

"Yes, I am obstinate," boomed the Mountain. "I am not for you."

"Alas, alas!" lamented the Farmer. "Alas, my son! It seems as if we shall never find you a wife! Tell me, Lady Mountain, is there none better than you?"

Then the Mountain groaned, and said, "There is one far better, for though I am obstinate and do not budge, I know of one who will some day destroy me. Dig, dig into my heart. Dig deep!"

Then the Farmer took a spade, and the Mouse dug with his paws, and they made a hole in the Mountain, and were digging when the Mountain groaned again.

"Listen," she begged of them, "oh, listen! Do you not hear?"

And they listened.

"I hear nothing," said the Farmer.

"Set your ear to the ground," said the Mountain.

So they set their ears to the ground, and the Mouse's ear was the keener, it was so large and round.

"I hear a sound of scratching!" he cried in excitement.

The Farmer listened again.

"I hear it, too!" he shouted. "Yes, it is most certainly something scratching."

"It is what I told you," sighed the Mountain. "Dig on. It is in my heart."

So the Farmer dug, and the Mouse dug, and the noise from the other side grew louder . . . scratch, scratch, SCRATCH! And suddenly, the earth broke away before them, and they all could see was a gaping hole, black and deep, reaching into the Mountain's heart.

Together they spoke in whispers into the hole, "Come out, come out! Come out, whoever you are!"

And there stepped forth from the darkness, a lady-mouse!

She wore a cloak of grey silk, her gloves were shell-pink, and between her ears was a diadem of dewdrops. And the Farmer would have spoken—would have asked him how he liked her—but the man-mouse held up his paw.

"Do not speak," he said, as if under an enchantment. "This is the lady who must be my wife."

And he gave her his arm, and they walked home slowly together; the Farmer following, a light of wonder in his eyes.

When they reached home, the Farmer put his finger to his lips, and his wife nodded.

For she, you remember, knew other things than ploughing.

Arranged from a Hindu Fable by Ronald Watkins.

X

A School for Crocodiles

ONCE upon a time, a boy running along by the river, very late for school, dropped a book from his satchel without noticing its loss. But a crafty Jackal lurking behind a rock, saw the book and, thinking it might be good to eat, pounced upon it the moment its owner was out of sight. Suddenly, however, the boy missed his book, and rushing back saw the Jackal making off with it.

"Hi! . . . Hi! . . . Hi! Stop, you miserable thief!" he yelled; and picking up a big stone hurled it at the Jackal, but missed the creature, who made off to his den with his prize between his teeth.

No sooner did he think himself safe than he tried the taste of the book, but finding it not to his liking began to think of some use for it.

"That boy," he said to himself, "goes to school to learn to read. He has a teacher who holds the book, and if the boy makes a mistake he gets angry and punishes him. Well, now I have a book I think I shall set up a school."

Strolling out of his den, the Jackal squatted down on the bank of the river and, pretending to look very learned, started to read aloud.

"Ibor, obor, ikaro sotro; ibor, obor, ikaro sotro . . ." he repeated over and over again.

The words were his own invention, but they did very well, for a Crocodile who lived in the river poked his ugly snout out of the water, and said, "What is that you keep repeating, Jackal?"

"Sir," replied the Jackal, "I am reading out of a learned book."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Crocodile. "Do you mean to tell me that you know how to read?"

"Of course I know how to read." The Jackal bent his sharp nose over the book again, as if he objected to being disturbed at his studies.

"Can you write too?" asked the Crocodile, heaving quite a length of his scaly body out of the water.

"Most certainly I can," said the Jackal.

"How fortunate!" The Crocodile showed his teeth in a most fearful grin and came another foot or so nearer the bank, which made the Jackal also shift a bit higher up.

"How fortunate!" repeated the Crocodile. "You are just the person I am looking for. How would it suit you to teach my five children?"

The Jackal raised his eyes from the book.

"I am really a pundit—a devoted scholar," he said, "but if you feel I am the right choice as a teacher for your little ones, I will do my best for them and for you."

"But wait a moment—" (the Crocodile appeared in some little difficulty as he spoke) "—you see, my children could not attend a school on dry land."

"We can get over that," replied the Jackal. "Further up the river is a nice deep pool. If your children attend there every day I can instruct them from the bank. They can come out of the water for their

lessons, and I can put them safely back in it when school is over."

"Can you write too?" asked the Crocodile.

"That is a capital idea," said the Crocodile; "I will saunter up the river and inspect the pool, and if I am

satisfied with its position, and so on, we can settle the matter."

"By all means see the pool," said the Jackal, "and satisfy yourself in every way, but I must tell you that once your children are pupils in my school, I do not encourage parents to visit it—that is, not in working hours."

"I quite see your point," replied the Crocodile; "and I'm sure you will find my children very apt. I rather pride myself on their abilities. However, one must not boast, one must not get too proud, of one's offspring."

"One must not," agreed the Jackal; and he returned to his book as if the matter of The School for Crocodiles had ceased to interest him.

However, a few days later the five little crocodiles were put into the pool higher up the river, and each morning the Jackal took his pupils out of the water and told them to repeat after him what he said.

"Ibor, obor, ikaro sotro—" he began. "Now then, all of you!"

"Ibor . . ." spluttered the eldest of the crocodiles.

"Go on!" ordered the Jackal.

"Ibor . . ." spluttered the second crocodile, then stuck, and seemed about to weep.

"Duffers!" yapped the Jackal.

"Duffers," whimpered the third little crocodile.

"This is awful!" fumed the Jackal. "My temper is rising to the top of my head! I shall do something violent in a moment!"

"Please, Sir!" The fourth little crocodile raised its snout. "What does it all mean?"

"Don't be impertinent!" howled the Jackal. "What's it to do with you what it means?"

"Yes, but please, Sir, if we knew what it meant, we might remember it," said the second crocodile sensibly.

"Oh, you might, might you! Well, remember that!" stormed the Jackal, cuffing all the little crocodiles so soundly that they howled for mercy. Then once again he repeated the lesson, but now, thoroughly scared and upset, none of them could get it right. The Jackal sat down on his tail, and eyed them gloomily.

"The kindest thing would be to eat these stupid little crocodiles, for they will never learn," he thought.

The next morning he took them out of the pool, and said, "I see that you can't remember anything when I take you in class together, so in future I will have you up one at a time. Perhaps you will do better like that."

But they didn't, for no sooner did the Jackal find that his pupil couldn't get past "Ibor" than he gobbled him up. And this went on until there was only one little crocodile left, hiding in the mud at the bottom of the pool.

It was then that old Father Crocodile came along to see how his children were getting on at school. The sight of him gave the Jackal a terrible fright.

"And how are the lessons progressing?" he asked, with his widest grin.

"Splendidly, splendidly!" replied the Jackal. "You'd be surprised to know just what I have done with your children."

"I told you they were pretty bright," chuckled the Crocodile. "Well, let's have a look at them."

This was very awkward for the Jackal, but his wits did not desert him. He went on ahead and,

going into the water, hauled up the last of the little crocodiles.

Holding him up for the old Crocodile to see, he cried out playfully, "See, here is one dear little chap!"

"One!" boomed the Crocodile.

Hurriedly the Jackal dipped the little Crocodile under the water, only to fish him up again immediately saying heartily, "Here's the next—a very bright scholar."

"Two!" The Crocodile looked very fixedly at the dripping object supposed to be his second son.

Once more the Jackal dipped the little crocodile, and hauled him out again, saying, "And this is our little know-all."

"Three!" was the Crocodile's only reply.

"Are you sure it's only three?" asked the Jackal, looking surprised, "because I could have sworn it was four."

"I said three!" snarled the Crocodile, lashing his tail a bit.

"Have it your own way," said the Jackal, and dipped the little crocodile again very hurriedly; dragging him up, the Jackal shouted, "You'll admit this is four!"

"Four!" grunted the Crocodile.

"I must ask you to excuse me," said the Jackal; "school is over, and you can see the rest of the scholars to-morrow."

The old Crocodile bared his teeth, and the Jackal added quickly, "And yet it won't take a moment to show you the fifth."

For the last time he dipped the poor little crocodile in the water and brought him up to view. The old

Crocodile had certainly seen a little crocodile five times, but he wasn't altogether happy about his children. He would rather have seen all five in a row. However, he went away to think things out.

The next day he hid behind a rock and watched. He saw the Jackal take the little crocodile out of the water and begin the lesson "Ibor, obor", but the poor little fellow could not get past "Ibor", and he began to weep. Tears—real crocodile tears—ran over his snout.

Then the Jackal lost his temper and began to cuff the creature, but with a roar the old Crocodile had the Jackal down and was at his throat, crying in a terrible rage, "Is that the way you treat my children? Show me my four little ones!"

But, of course, the Jackal could not do that, and so the Crocodile put an end to him, and The School for Crocodiles, and took his remaining child home.

XI

The Judgement of the Shepherd

MUCALINDA, the King Cobra, uncoiled himself and slid out of his hole, leaving his wife and seven young sons sleeping. He had a fancy to smell the sweet, fresh, evening air, and moving swiftly over the moonlit grass made his way towards where the fountains played into a deep pool quite near to the Royal Palace.

The pool was sweet with the scent of lotus buds, and he would have remained there, coiled like a great silver bracelet in the moonlight, but from the great Hall of the Palace came the sound of flutes and zithers. Mucalinda felt his hood tremble and expand with excitement, for of all things he loved music. And having no cause for fear—being protected as a sacred creature from man's violence or destruction—he moved confidently towards the Palace, and wriggled himself up the many marble steps into the great Hall.

At the far end sat the King on a dais covered with cloth of gold; and grouped round him were his family and men of high rank, gorgeous in padded robes, and all wearing turbans sparkling with jewels.

The royal ladies were present, too, exotic as painted butterflies in their saris of silk and gauze. And the most beautiful among them was the young wife of the Prince, royal in her own right, and the proud mother of four young sons.

The court musicians at the foot of the platform on which the royal family were seated, had not their equal in all India. Their fathers, grandfathers, and even more distant ancestors, had all been musicians in the King's family.

Mucalinda, the King Cobra, descended himself from a royal line of serpents, responded at once to the enchanting strains, and had a great desire to dance. No one had seen the snake enter, for although a thousand little lamps shed their soft light in the Hall, the floor itself was in shadow, and it was not until Mucalinda had reared himself up to almost his full length, and unfurled his splendid hood, that a scream of terror from the Princess startled the whole company.

"The snake, the snake!" she cried. "He advances on me! He will strike! he will strike!" And she screamed again.

A kind of dumb silence, the silence of sheer horror, fell upon that gay scene; but the Cobra—unaware of anything but the ecstasy of his dance—advanced still a little nearer to the cowering girl.

The musicians dropped their instruments, and fell upon their faces. The courtiers felt for their swords, but were powerless to use them. Only the King appeared to rise above the fascination of the snake, and said the right word.

"Leave the Cobra alone!" he commanded, "for he is under the protection of a sacred law."

And, as if assured by the royal decree, the Cobra advanced still a little nearer to the Princess.

"Save me, save me!" she implored her husband; and the Prince, both horrified and enraged, drew his sword and laid the dancing Mucalinda dead at the foot of the royal dais.

Then said the King, "You have committed a great wrong, my son, for which you will surely be punished." Turning to his servants, he bade them remove the dead snake, which they did in fear and trembling.

The royal Astrologer was sent for to advise the King on this unfortunate matter. He brought his books, his globes, and all the things needed to recite a powerful mantram (charm), but he was unable to promise that the Prince would come out of the difficulty unscathed.

The night was passed in foreboding; but the Snake Queen slept with her children, and did not dream that anything was wrong until the sun rose and her husband was still absent. Then she began to feel uneasy, for he always sought the dark cool of his hole as the rays of the sun grew in power.

Some hours went by and still there was no sign of Mucalinda. And now she knew that some bad thing had happened to him. Bidding her sons stay where they were, she slipped out into the open and like an arrow sped through the matted undergrowth of what was called "The Serpents' Shrine". Then, with unerring instinct, she made for the lotus pool. And there, quite lifeless, lay her husband.

"Some man has done this," said the Snake Queen to herself, "but whoever he may be—no matter if he wear a crown, or only a ragged turban—I will have his life."

And so she waited, curled up under a great stone, and learned what she wanted to know—the name of the slayer of her husband.

Two of the Palace gardeners came by and, squatting down to smoke, disclosed the whole affair. "The Prince will now have no luck," said one, "for last night he slew the King Cobra, whose family have lived in the Serpent Shrine for hundreds of years. And all this, if you please, because the Princess screamed at the sight of the snake who had found his way into the Hall—looking for milk, or mice, or something to his fancy."

"Well, we shall see what we shall see," quoth the other, "but I for one am glad I do not stand in the Prince's shoes, jewelled though they may be."

"It is just as well for you, humble man," thought the Snake Queen, "that you stand in no shoes at all." And she slid unseen towards the Palace.

The day went by. The Astrologer had gone back to his cave, with the intention of consulting the stars when they came out. He said that he hoped he might be able to get some help from them in the matter of the Prince's fate. It was only the Prince himself who seemed unconcerned about the slaying of the sacred Cobra. His beloved Princess had called on him for help, and he had hastened to her aid. That was all.

But one of his sons, the little boy-prince who had been peeping through the bead curtain, was heard to say, "The big snake—he was dancing to the music."

No one, however, regarded a child's prattle. Everyone agreed that the killing of the King Cobra was an unholy thing. All were sure that the last had not been heard of the affair.

They were right.

The Snake Queen bided her time, watching all who came in and out of the Palace. She waited until day had turned into night, and as the long hours went slowly by she made a vow—that as the Prince had made her a widow, so would she make his wife a widow, too.

And when it was quite dark and everyone asleep, she crept into the Prince's bedroom and coiled herself round his neck. And this is where the Prince found her when he awoke. He dared not move, and remained as still as if he were turned to stone, but as he did not come out of his room as usual, the Queen, his mother, went to see what was the matter.

Her shriek brought in the King, and very quickly many of his courtiers. But at first no one had the least idea what to do. The Snake Queen wound herself yet a little tighter round the Prince's neck, and watched every movement of every person in the room.

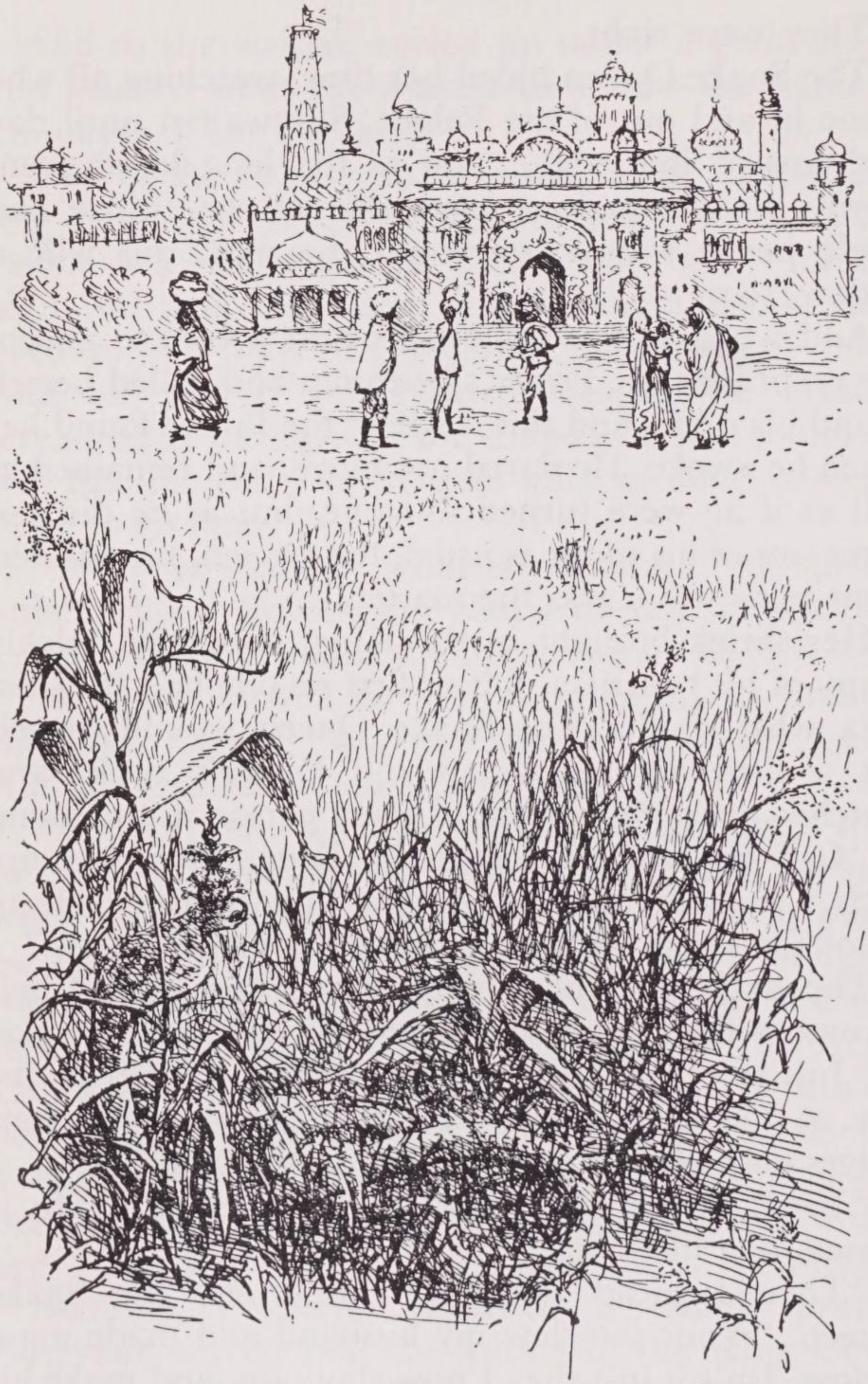
"Call the archers," said the King, "for they are such wonderful marksmen that they will be able to shoot the snake without hurting the Prince at all."

The archers came, six of them, and fitted their arrows to their bows, when suddenly the Snake spoke.

"Justice, O King!" she demanded. "Respect the law. A life for a life! Is not that the sentence your judges pass when murder is done in the land?"

"Yes," agreed the King, "a sentence of death is passed on a life-taker."

"Then I plead the law," continued the Snake Queen. "Your son slew my husband and made me a widow. Isn't it just that I now slay him, and make his wife a widow also?"



The Snake Queen bided her time, watching all who came in and out of the Palace.

The King was much upset by the words of the Snake, but as the lawgiver of the land he had to admit that she had right on her side.

"And yet," he said, "we pass a sentence without the authority of the judges. We must consult them, and accept their decree."

"I agree to that," said the Snake Queen. "All the same, I shall stay where I am until judgment is passed."

So they hurried up the judges, bidding them consult their law books and make haste to get together to administer the law. But as there had never been such a case in all the experience of these learned men, they confessed that they were unable to pronounce upon it at all.

The King was in despair. "Does no one in all my dominions know how to get a snake off my son's neck?" he cried, quite wildly.

And someone—merely a common man who moved much about the country—declared that among the hill shepherds all matters of dispute were settled quite simply, and always very quickly.

"Let us seek the hill shepherds then!" proclaimed the King. And he ordered all the court out to accompany him, as well as the poor Prince, with the Snake still coiled round his neck.

"Promise not to bite my son until judgment is passed," begged the King. And the Snake Queen said that she was not without a sense of honour, but wished to hear for herself the decision which the hill shepherds might come to on the case.

And so the strange company set off, riding up hill and down, until they came almost into the heart of

the mountains. And here, under a bright moon, they found a group of shepherds sitting beside a fire of sticks, for the night had grown cold.

At first the shepherds were very frightened at the approach of such a grand company. They began to think of everything they might have done to displease the King. For here he was, riding towards them in person. No doubt to have them arrested.

But no! The King dismounted; so did the courtiers; only the Prince with the Snake round his neck sat quite motionless on his white horse. The Snake kept perfectly still, too. She was waiting to win her case, and to make the Prince's wife a widow.

"Worthy Shepherds!" said the King. "We have heard of your simple wisdom, and of how you manage to settle knotty points of the law without consulting the royal judges. Well, we have brought you a problem which those same judges cannot solve. As you see there, my son, the Prince, sits with a deadly snake coiled round his neck. Now, the husband of this snake came into my Palace Hall and, rearing himself up, spread his hood and advanced within striking distance of the Princess. And so the Prince killed him. The Snake you see round my son's neck claims that as she has been made a widow, so must the Princess be. What is your opinion, O wise men?"

"I think the Snake has justice on her side," the first shepherd declared, "for if anyone made my wife a widow, I'd soon make his wife one!"

"But how could you do that if you were dead?" asked the King, quite puzzled.

He turned to the second shepherd, who gave his opinion: "I think that if your son killed the Snake in

the Palace Hall, the Snake had the right to kill him."

"But the Snake was already dead! How could he kill the Prince?" cried out a courtier; and the second shepherd looked foolish, and stood back.

But the third and fourth shepherds would have it that if a Prince was a Prince, a Snake was a Snake, and each must kill the other if it were possible.

And now the King was completely confused by the shepherds' wisdom, until the fifth shepherd—an old man with a long white beard—stepped forward and humbly salaamed the royal company. The Snake watched him closely with her beady eye, for she knew that on his words the outcome of the case rested.

"O King!" began the old shepherd, "I would ask of you two questions."

"Ask on," replied the King graciously.

"First of all," said the shepherd, "I must ask how many sons the Princess has."

"Four," replied the King.

"My second question is," continued the Shepherd, "how many sons has Mistress Snake?"

"Seven," replied the Snake Queen proudly.

"Then," said the shepherd, "it will be just and right for the widowed Snake to kill His Highness the Prince, when Her Highness the Princess has three sons more."

Everyone stood and gaped at the lawgiver. It was, after all, so simple. The Snake Queen slipped at once from round the Prince's neck, and hissed out at all the company as she slid away:

"Who would have thought that a simple old shepherd would outwit me, the very fount of wisdom? But his judgment is quite fair. Farewell, King, and

all the rest of you gathered here to my undoing. But be sure to let me know when the Princess has had three more sons. Then I will come again for judgment. Then there will be two widows, while now there is only one!"

Then the King rewarded the wise old shepherd for his fine judgment, and all the royal company went home.

That night, the Prince said to the Princess, "We have four fine sons. Enough, I think, to make us happy."

"Indeed yes," agreed the Princess. "I, myself, would not care to have even one more. Four are quite enough to bring up properly."

And so the Snake Queen never came back, for she was a creature of her word. Also she had enough to think about with seven sons to rear, and the eldest now King Cobra in his father's stead.

But the little boy Prince would still have it that the snake which came into the Palace Hall had meant no harm to anyone, but was only dancing, as he had seen other cobras dance when there was music.

XII

The Mouse and the Wizard

A TIMID mouse, fearing that every shadow was the cat, dared not venture out of his hole, and grew quite thin with hunger and worry. A friend, coming to visit him, was quite shocked to see the state the poor little creature was reduced to.

"How's this?" he wanted to know; "the harvest moon is up, the corn gathered in, and every prudent mouse has been a-gleaning to lay up food for the winter."

"I know, I know!" replied the timid one, "and I would have gone a-gleaning, too, but if I so much as put my whiskers outside, the demon of a cat will have me. And what good would even a bushel of grain be to me then?"

"You are unlucky," declared the friend. "I am an old mouse now and, as you see, no cat has ever caught me, nor—so far as I know—any member of my family, which seems even more numerous than usual. Come! Pull yourself together—take a bit of a risk—and when you are frisking out in the cornfield you will forget all about the cat."

"But he won't forget about me," persisted the other, "for it is my fate so long as I remain a mouse, sooner or later, to be caught by a cat. I cannot escape my doom. There is no way out of it."

"Unless you were changed into a cat," said the friend thoughtfully. "Cats don't eat cats, I imagine."

"But how could a mouse become a cat?" asked the timid one, in great surprise.

"I admit it might be a difficult operation," said the friend, "and only possible if performed under the spell of a wizard. As you know, we have such a person nearby. It might be worth your while to consult him, at any rate, and see if he has enough magic by him to do the job."

"But how am I to get there before I am caught by the cat?" asked the timid one, his whiskers twitching in trepidation.

"That you must find out for yourself," replied the friend, and took a hasty leave, for he was getting tired of this miserable fellow.

"Oh, but wait just a minute," begged the timid one. "Where does the Wizard live?"

"In a cave—deep in the forest," said the friend. "Oh, and by the way, he won't transform you free. You'll have to pay him, you know."

"But how can I pay him? I've nothing left except a little paw-full of last year's rice." And the timid one began to sniff and snuffle with self-pity as he thought of his luckless state.

"Take him that! Take him that! Say you'll bring him something more when you've got it," advised the friend, and scuttled off, for he felt the neighbourhood was not very cheerful.

The timid mouse did as he was told, and when all was dark as pitch slipped out of his hole and made his way under the grass and bushes into the depths of the forest.

He had gone quite a long way when he saw a light shining, and heard a curious low humming sound, much like that of a top spinning at full speed.

"That must be the Wizard at his charming," he thought, and running up to the door of the cave gave a squeak just outside it.

"Who's there?" rumbled the Wizard, who was busy with charms and things, and hated to be disturbed in the middle of his work.

"It is I—a frightened little mouse," was the reply.

"Well, come in, and hang your fright behind the door," said the Wizard, "and mind you, don't make a sound or you'll put me out of step with this charm I'm practising." And he began to hum like a top again.

When the mouse began to feel he was forgotten, he gave just a tiny squeak, at which the Wizard promptly threw a shoe at him.

"Botheration!" he exclaimed angrily. "Who are you to spoil a good charm!"

"Sorry, sir," apologized the mouse, "but I thought you had forgotten me."

"Of course I had forgotten you!" replied the Wizard testily. "Who are you to remember, anyway? But since you're here, you'd better tell me what you've come for."

"To ask your advice, wonderful sir," said the mouse humbly.

"What about?" enquired the Wizard.

"I wish to be turned into a cat—" began the mouse, but the Wizard silenced him with a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha ha!" he chuckled; "that's good, that's very good! But I thought mice detested cats? Oh,

but I see a reason—you want to turn cannibal, you little villain, and devour as many mice as you can catch."

The mouse grew almost angry. "That's not my reason at all. I want to live a little longer, which I certainly shall not do if I stay as I am."

"Why?" asked the Wizard.

"The cat will catch me," was the doleful reply.

"Come here," said the Wizard, and he picked up a whippy little wand.

The mouse shrank back at the sight of it, but the Wizard assured him he wasn't going to beat him, but only turn him into a cat.

"But you must keep perfectly still while I am doing it," said the old man, "and you'll have to learn to purr and growl. Your present squeak won't do at all for a cat."

"Couldn't you put my noises into the spell?" asked the mouse.

"I could," agreed the Wizard, "but it would add to the expense. This wand of mine is very powerful, but I can't, of course, use it on you free."

"Are cats expensive?" The mouse thought about his little hoard of rice as he spoke.

"Well, not very, as charges go," replied the Wizard. "I've a price-list hanging up just beside the cauldron. Let me see now . . .!"

He put on an immense pair of spectacles, and as the mouse crept up to his side began to read out aloud. "Mice to Cats—14 annas. Black Cats with long whiskers and sharp claws—one rupee. Rum, ha! Cats to Dogs . . ." He broke off, and looked at the mouse over the top of his spectacles.

"How would you like to be a dog, mousie?" he asked.

"I don't like dogs much—" began the mouse, but the Wizard was consulting his price-list again.

"Let me see," he muttered. "Cats to Dogs—no, you don't want that. Monkeys to Children, Children to Donkeys . . ." Once more he turned to the little mouse, "Now, how would you like to be a donkey? It's a cheap charm, unless you want a double bray."

"What else have you got?" asked the mouse, who was getting quite excited at the thought of what he might soon become.

"Jackals to Hyenas, Hyenas to Panthers, Panthers to Tigers!" reeled off the Wizard, when suddenly the mouse gave a loud squeak and leapt right into the air.

"I'll be a tiger—a big, Bengal tiger!" he declared; "and please to make me many stripes, and very broad. Oh and I shall want a lot of long sharp teeth."

"Stripes and teeth are the most expensive extras I've got. Tigers are dear in any case and a good roar costs a little fortune" said the Wizard. "What are you prepared to pay?" he added firmly.

The mouse shrank back. "At present just a few grains of rice," he said very humbly, "but when I'm a tiger, I expect my fortune will improve."

"It should," said the Wizard. "Well, I'll take the risk—change you from a mouse slap-bang into a tiger, relying on your promise to settle your bill as soon as you have settled into your new skin."

"And that's very fair," agreed the mouse; thinking to himself, "When I'm a tiger I'll pay when I choose. Even a Wizard will have to be careful of me then."

The Wizard picked up his wand. The mouse got into position under it, and although he quaked when he heard the swish and felt the wind the magic stick

Even the Wizard himself

set up, he kept as still as he could, while the Wizard began his loudest hum.

"O mouse, be a tiger!" he chanted.

Only that. Not another word. But so strong was the charm that even the Wizard himself felt a little nervous of the great ferocious-looking tiger he had made.

felt a little nervous.

There the beast stood—just in front of him—his broad stripes shining like ebony on the lighter fur. With strong teeth bared, and a threatening

snarl, the tiger—who had been a mouse—menaced him.

Holding his wand, the Wizard climbed up quickly on to the very top of a cupboard, and flapping the tails of his long coat at the tiger, quavered, "Now don't start being noisy and naughty, if you please."

A roar was the only reply.

"Be off!" shouted the Wizard, brandishing his wand, "or I'll *un-tiger* you!"

The tiger took the hint and went bounding out of the cave, then, crashing through the jungle, came out on to the high road. With yells of terror every man, woman and child upon it went fleeing in all directions, while even the bullocks pulling the country carts took fright, and dragged their loads into the ditch.

"How splendid!" purred the tiger. "Everyone, and everything, is afraid of *me*. Now I shall have things all my own way for a change."

And for a time he did, living comfortably on his kill.

But something happened which made the mouse's heart inside the tiger quake with fear, for he overheard two woodcutters talking and making fun of "the big Bengal tiger"—who was nothing of the sort, but only a timid little mouse whose shape had been changed by the magic of the Wizard's wand.

"And I can tell you," said one of the men, "if that tiger sees a cat, he will bolt into a hole."

"Or if you mewed," laughed the other, "be off to who knows where!"

When the tiger heard all this he was simply furious. So his secret was out! The old fraud of a Wizard must have been boasting.

"He is a cheat," thought the tiger, "but I'll be even with him! With one blow of my paw I'll knock the humming old fraud down, and see he doesn't get up again either, to spread his tales about me and my family history all over the place! How dare anyone say I'm not what I look!"

So he set off to the Wizard's cave, and gave a loud double roar just to show he was coming.

"I can't see you now," called out the Wizard; "I'm busy with charms and things."

"See you I must," growled the tiger.

"What about?" asked the Wizard.

"Your bill," replied the tiger.

"Have you come to pay it?" went on the Wizard.

"Yes—in full," was the answer.

The Wizard wiped his hands free of spell and stuff, pulled down his sleeves, and picked up his wand.

"Come in, come in!" he cried, quite genially.

The tiger stalked into the cave, and glaring at the Wizard, snarled out, "I'm going to eat you."

"You'll find me tough," replied the Wizard gently, but he gripped his wand more securely.

"I know," said the tiger, "but something has to be done to settle your account."

"Why, so it has," agreed the Wizard, waving his wand with grace and vigour.

"O tiger, be a mouse!" he said.

And a little mouse went scuttling out of the cave.

A Hindu fable. Collected and re-told by Lucia Turnbull.

XIII

The Beetle and a Drop of Honey

ONCE, long ago, there lived in Northern India a Rajah called Surya Pratap, a name which means "Powerful as the Sun". Now, if this Raja was not equal to the Sun, he thought himself so, and expected everyone to obey his slightest wish without question. He would never listen to a word of advice, or think twice before he acted, often in a cruel and unjust manner, and he was ready to punish unmercifully anyone who crossed his will even in the smallest matter.

Now, this Raja had a Vizier, his Chief Minister of State, a man whom he trusted and seemed to be fond of. The minister was called Dhairya-Sila, or "the Patient One", and his name suited him, for never, even under the greatest provocation, did he lose his temper or, like his royal master, act in a hasty and unreasonable manner.

Dhairya-Sila was much respected by the people, and if some envied him his beautiful house, fine jewels, noble horses, and retinue of servants, they realised that all these had been earned honestly and by good service to the State.

But among all his treasures, Dhairya-Sila valued one far, far above the rest—his wife, Buddhi-Mati, known as "the Sensible One". He had chosen her himself when they were both young, and he had still his way to make in the world, and if anyone had asked him to whom he owed his success, he would have said at once, "To Buddhi-Mati. Without her I should be nobody." And he meant it, loving nothing better than, when his many duties at the Court were over, to spend a quiet hour with her in the garden of their home, listening to the fountains plashing into their marble basins, and the sweet notes of the Bulbul, or talking over the happenings of the day.

One evening, when the moon was so bright that they could see each other as if in daylight, and after neither of them had spoken for some time, Dhairya-Sila said quite suddenly, "Suppose our good fortune vanished!"

"Why, what do you mean, husband?" asked Buddhi-Mati, quite startled. "Has anything happened to-day to make you say such a thing?"

"No," replied her husband; "but the Raja has been heaping even more favours upon me just lately, and it's natural enough that some at Court have grown jealous."

"But you are so far above the rest in the Raja's affections," said Buddhi-Mati, "that you can afford to take no notice of such things."

"I don't know"—the Vizier spoke thoughtfully. "The Raja is so capricious that some odd idea might take root in his mind. Anyway, dearest of all, do not be surprised at anything that may happen."

Buddhi-Mati rose from her place beside the fountain, and as she stood there, tall, slender, and straight, her

husband thought, "She is like a lily, so pure and beautiful!" But Buddhi-Mati was thinking quite hard.

"Husband," she said, at last, "have you any reason to suspect there is a plot against you?"

"Not yet," replied Dhairya-Sila, "but you know the Raja's temper—restless, arrogant, suspicious!"

"Alas!" sighed Buddhi-Mati.

"Yesterday," continued the Vizier, "an enemy brought some tale against me to the Rajah. The man lost his ears. To-day my name was spoken against. Somewhere, my enemy will languish forgotten in an airless cell. But, dear woman, each straw, broken and weak though it may be, yet shows which way the wind blows. I noted a coolness in the manner of the Raja's farewell to me to-night, and his eyes glowed like those of a panther on the track of its quarry."

"Husband!" cried Buddhi-Mati, "let us fly from this place!"

"Why?" asked the Vizier, much surprised.

"It is not safe!" she replied, and tears made her voice tremble.

"Buddhi-Mati!" The Vizier's tones were gentle, and he even sounded amused. "Buddhi-Mati, why did I marry you?"

His wife turned to look at him. Yes, he was laughing, and so he could not be really afraid.

"Why did you marry me!" she repeated, and her own lips curled in a smile. "Of a truth, husband, I have never yet been sure of the real reason."

He rose from his seat, and took her hand. "There is no one reason," he said quietly; "but of all, this stands at the head. I married you because you were so

sensible—no, don't speak for a moment, wife—and I feel to-night as if your sense was the most precious thing we both possess, and because of it"—he paused and snapped his fingers—"I don't care that for any enemy, nor for the Raja and all his tantrums. All the same, my dear, we must be prepared for a change in our present most fortunate state."

It turned out that Dhairya-Sila was right. A change was indeed coming. A word here, a word there in the Raja's ear, and the power of the Chief Minister rocked dangerously. For a day or two the Raja contented himself with cold and haughty looks, treating his favourite with open rudeness. And then, like a bolt from the blue, came a command to execute a deed so shameful that Dhairya-Sila, who up to this had borne the Raja's rudeness with dignity and patience, sprang up from his place of honour with a loud "No!"

"No!" roared the Raja. "Who dare say 'No' to ME?"

A dozen hands sprang to the sword-hilt. But Dhairya-Sila held his ground, a splendid figure in his gorgeous robes of honour, so splendid that the would-be assassins held back, for Dhairya-Sila, too, carried a sword. But he carried more, too, a courage so obvious that all those watching felt that the first to attack him would be a dead man.

The Raja fidgeted. He was furious, but he was in doubt. He wanted his own way, but he could not see that by cutting down his Chief Minister he would get it.

"Who dare say 'NO' to me?" he repeated, but less violently. He began to hope that Dhairya-Sila would

climb down and be ready to eat humble pie. But one look at the Vizier chased any such hope away. There he stood, stern, resolute, and quite unrepentant. Something must be done with him, and soon.

The Raja breathed hard, and when he spoke the words came jerkily, for he was working himself into a towering passion.

"A subject who disobeys me has not long to live!" he thundered, "but because you have risen high in my favour, Dhairya-Sila, death shall come gently and slowly. Thus you will have longer to repent of your sins."

"Sire," replied the Vizier calmly, "do with me as you will. But whatever my fate, I know that yours will be to repent day and night of your ingratitude towards one whose only fault was in refusing to act unworthily at your bidding."

At these proud words, the Raja flew into the most ungovernable rage. Summoning the guard, he ordered that Dhairya-Sila should be seized and taken to the top of a high tower which stood outside the city walls, and there be left without food or water, and with no shelter from the sun. This in itself was a death sentence. But the men of the guard held back. Not one of them wished to be the first to lay rough hands upon the person of the Vizier. In vain the Raja stormed. The men only gave him ugly looks and shifted their pikes and clubs uneasily. Then Dhairya-Sila, seeing their risk and quandary, said quietly:

"But, men of the guard, I go with you right gladly. It is for the Raja to command. For us to obey."

The men, much relieved to find that they need not hustle so great a person as the Chief Minister of State,

even when in disfavour, closed in about him, when Dhairya-Sila, without any sign of fear, saluted the Raja in his customary fashion, and, surrounded by the guard, moved away.

But in his heart of hearts, he was thinking: "My poor Buddhi-Mati! When I do not return to-night, how anxious she will be!" He had no means of sending her a message, and so she waited for him in the garden, hour after hour, and then, when it was almost daybreak, concluded that something terrible must have happened. Veiling herself closely, she slipped out of the gates. Although it was barely light, a group of water-carriers were standing in the road, and in their midst an old man talking loudly.

"He knows something," thought Buddhi-Mati, and crept up to the group, straining her ears not to miss a word of the old man's gabble.

"Ah, ha!" he cackled, "pride goes before a fall. And what a big tumble the Vizier has had, to be sure."

"Hm," put in one of the men, "but he'll climb up again higher than ever."

"Hee, hee, hee!" the old man giggled until he coughed for breath—"he's high enough already, is Dhairya-Sila."

Buddhi-Mati felt that she would faint with terror. Had they hanged her husband, then? But the old man's next words brought some comfort.

"The story is," continued the old man, delighted to be the first to tell it—"the story is, that the Raja flew into one of his tempers and ordered the Vizier to do something very bad indeed!"

"And then?" put in a listener, his eyes goggling.

"The Vizier said 'NO'!" The old man gave a jump to show his excitement.

"No! to the Raja!" The men could hardly believe their ears.

"Well, that was a risky answer!" said one, with a shake of the head.

"But the Vizier kept his wits about him" (the old man gave a chuckle of enjoyment), "for even when he learned what his fate would be, he turned and trounced the Raja soundly, speaking to him like a father would do to a naughty little boy. Ha, ha! there's courage for you!"

"Yes, but what was the punishment?" asked one of the men, and Buddhi-Mati let her veil slip from about her ears, so that she could hear everything.

"I told you the Vizier was high enough now," replied the old man, "for he's imprisoned on the top of the tower outside the city wall, and left without food or drink and at the mercy of the mid-day sun."

"He'll soon perish for saying 'No' to the Raja!" declared another of the men.

But Buddhi-Mati waited to hear no more. She realized that only she herself could do anything to save her husband, but also that she must wait until it was dark before she set off to find him.

At midnight, and still more closely veiled, she slipped through the gates again, and into the road which led through the bazaar. Here all was deserted, except for a few pariah dogs snuffling and growling over the refuse-heaps. It was a long way to the tower, but she never slackened her pace, for she knew that every moment was important. An hour's delay might cost the Vizier his life. It was still dark when she reached

the foot of the tower, but by the dim light of the stars she could just make out the form of her husband leaning over the iron railing which ran round the platform.

"My lord, it is I, your wife Buddhi-Mati," she said in a low, clear voice. And the answer came as softly and clearly:

"Ah, Buddhi-Mati, I knew you would come. And a nice perch you find me on, too."

"Tell me how to help you," she said, urgently.

"Well, only you can help me," he replied, "so listen carefully. At this time to-morrow night return to the foot of the tower bringing these things——"

"Yes?" whispered Buddhi-Mati, straining her ears so as not to miss one word.

"First," said Dhairya-Sila, "I shall want a beetle."

"A beetle!" echoed Buddhi-Mati, in surprise.

"Yes, a beetle," repeated her husband, "and you must choose a strong, resolute, and greedy insect, for much depends on it, I can tell you. Secondly, I shall want sixty yards of the finest silken thread, fine as a spider's web."

"Sixty yards of the finest silken thread," repeated Buddhi-Mati, as if saying a lesson.

"—sixty yards of cotton thread——" continued the Vizier.

"—sixty yards of cotton thread——" echoed Buddhi-Mati.

"—yes, as thin as you can get it, but very strong," continued her husband; "sixty yards of good stout twine, Buddhi-Mati——"

"Yes," she replied—"sixty yards of good stout twine."

"That's right, and sixty yards of rope strong enough to bear my weight——"

Buddhi-Mati gave a gasp as her husband asked for the rope, but there was still something else he wanted, and of all, the most surprising.

"And," he concluded, "one drop of the purest honey!"

"But, husband," said poor Buddhi-Mati, "what use will one drop of honey be to you, on the top of this horrible tower as you are?"

"Don't ask me any questions, but go home, sleep well, and dream of me," replied Dhairya-Sila, "and be sure to bring all I ask you, and at this time to-morrow night."

Buddhi-Mati went home as quickly as she had come, and began to search at once for all the things the Vizier wanted.

She had some difficulty in finding silk fine enough, and so very thin that it was like that of a spider's web. The rest was easy, except for the beetle. There were many in the garden and of various kinds, but some seemed too small and fragile, and others so black and sulky, that she left them alone. But at last, and just when her heart was failing her, she saw a very handsome, strong-looking specimen, shining and brilliantly green. She knew him, too, for one of a kind that loved honey.

"This," she cried out aloud, "is the very beetle that I need."

She caught it easily, and put it with a leaf in a silken purse in the bosom of her robe. Then, with a little phial of honey, stolen from the bees, and her balls and coils of silk, cotton, twine, and rope all ready, she

waited for the night to come. But all the time she was thinking "What can my lord want with the beetle? What can he want with the honey?" and then, "But oh! If only he were safely down from that cruel tower!" And she hated the fierce sun which must be beating down upon his defenseless head, and still more she hated the Rajah.

But at last the weary day of waiting ended. The sun went down, dusk fell quickly, and the stars appeared one by one in the sky. From the bazaar below the sounds of voices dwindled and save for the mournful howl of a lone jackal on the prowl, all was still. Then Buddhi-Mati, veiling herself and carrying her tools of rescue, carefully slipped out of the gates again and hurried on her way. At the foot of the tower she rested, her eyes piercing the darkness for a sight of her lord.

"Is it well for you?" she called very softly, and then added, "I have them all, the things you told me to bring here. The silken thread, the cotton, twine, rope, the beetle and the drop of honey."

"Then indeed it is well with me," replied the Vizier, in a voice of joy; "and I hope soon it will be even better. I knew, Buddhi-Mati, that you would not fail me. But there is no time to lose. Another day of heat and thirst would just about finish me."

"That vile tower, that wicked Raja!" exclaimed Buddhi-Mati.

"Shhh!" warned her husband. "It is true that the sentries are sleepy and careless, but should one open an eye or cock an ear, the game might be up for both of us."

"Heaven forbid they should awaken!" said Buddhi-Mati, "but hasten, husband, and tell me what to do."

"First of all," began Dhairya-Sila, "you must tie the end of the silken thread round the middle of the beetle——"

"I hope it will let me do that," sighed poor Buddhi-Mati, feeling for the beetle where it lay in the purse which she had hidden beneath her robe. "I've got it," she called up softly, "and I'm just going to tie the silk about its middle."

"Be sure to leave its legs free!" warned Dhairya-Sila. "It will need to use them soon. Now, if the silken thread is fast, smear a drop of honey on the beetle's nose, then set the little creature on the wall, with its nose pointed upwards towards me. It will smell the honey ahead of it and climb, hoping to reach a full comb."

"There, I've done that!" said Buddhi-Mati; "the beetle is on the wall. "

"Has it started to climb?" asked Dhairya-Sila anxiously.

"Yes, like anything," replied his wife.

"Have you the ball of silk held tight in your hand?" was Dhairya-Sila's next question .

"Yes," replied his wife again.

"Then let it unwind very slowly," said her husband, "but be sure not to let it slip, for my very life depends upon this frail link with you."

Charmed with the smell of the honey in front of it, the little beetle climbed steadily and manfully until it reached the tower top, where the hand of Dhairya-Sila closed gently over it. Then, releasing it from the silken thread, keeping the end securely in one hand, with the other he placed the beetle in the soft folds of his turban, then called down to Buddhi-Mati again.

"Now tie the cotton thread firmly to the end of the silk you hold, and let it unwind slowly in the same way. She tied the ends carefully, and soon heard a grunt of satisfaction from the top of the tower. Dhairya-Sila had hauled up the silken thread very slowly and carefully, and now the end of the cotton thread was in his hand. Breaking off the silk, he put that, too, in his turban, and began to pull up the cotton as carefully as the silk.

"The work is now half done," he called down to the valiant Buddhi-Mati. "Now tie the end of the cotton to the twine."

"I have done that," replied Buddhi-Mati.

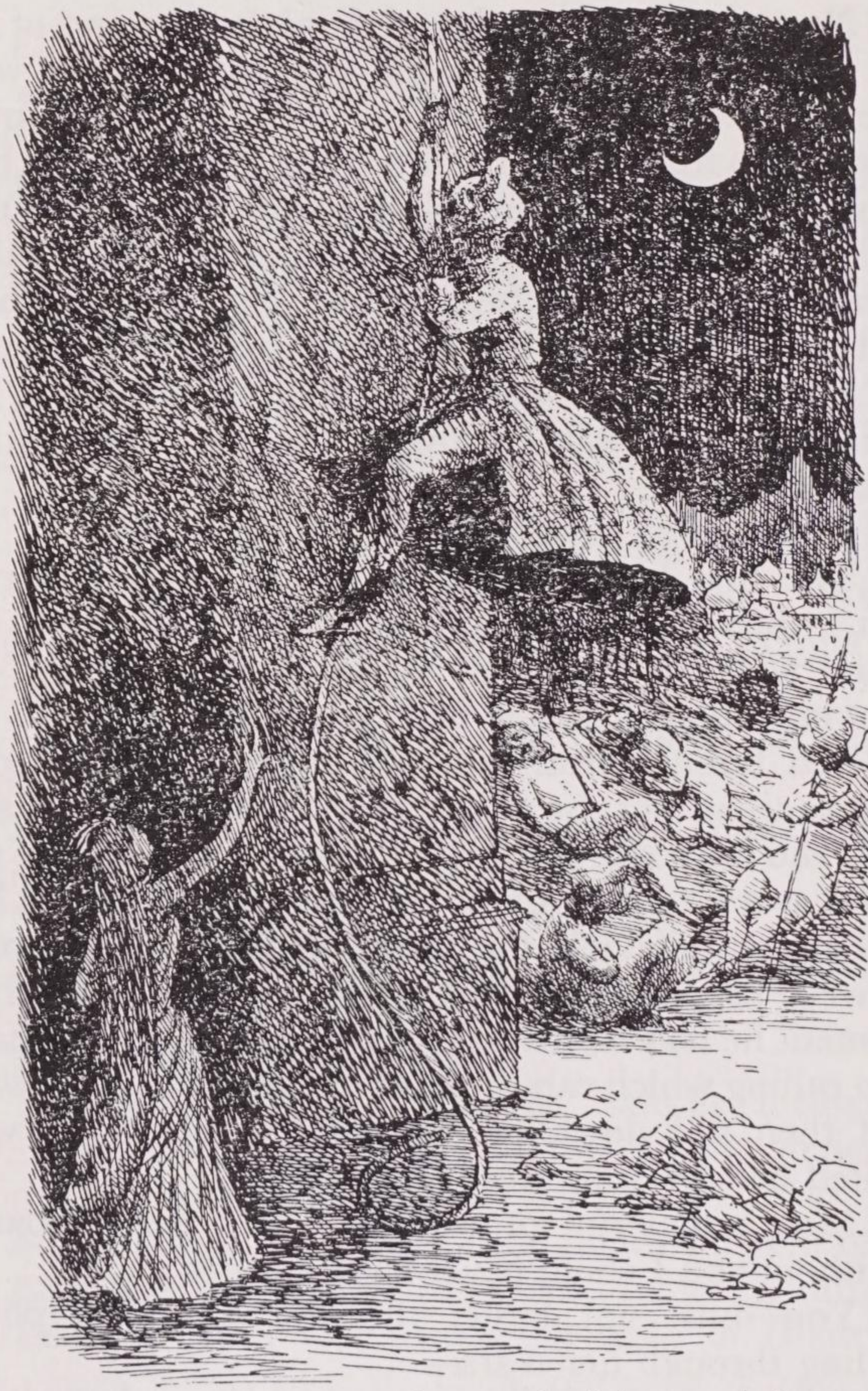
"The first length is in my hand," said Dhairya-Sila, when a few anxious moments had gone by. "And now my dear, it is the turn of the rope. Your knot must be firm as the faith I have in you."

Then Buddhi-Mati took the rope, and she tied a knot so tight that the edge cut into her soft hands, and as it slid through her fingers, little drops of her red blood were carried up to the beloved prisoner. But as Dhairya-Sila felt the harsh strength of the rope between his palms, he gave a little cry of triumph. In a moment he had knotted the rope securely to the heavy iron railing which ran round the platform of the tower, and then slid down to the bottom, where his wife waited half weeping from fear and joy.

"Most wonderful of women!" said her husband, "without you I could never have escaped."

"You must not forget the beetle," she replied, smiling through her tears.

"I do not," he said gravely, "and I have brought it to safety with me." Then, taking off his turban, he showed her the insect safe in its soft folds.



Dhairya-Sila felt the harsh strength of the rope between his palms.

"Together we will carry it back to the garden where you found it," he continued, "and there it may take up its own way of life."

"And look!" she cried. "I kept it yet another drop of honey as a reward if it was able to carry the ladder of escape up to you." And very gently she dabbed what was left of the honey on the astonished beetle's nose.

Then they went home without talking, for their hearts were too full for speech. And after placing the beetle in the very spot where Buddhi-Mati had found it, they went into the house before it was yet day. And Dhairya-Sila hid himself from the servants, as he was anxious that no news of his escape should reach the palace before he had made up his mind what to do.

In the meantime the Raja was miserable. And the thought that he might have brought about the death of the wisest man in his kingdom began to weigh heavily upon him. But he was too proud, too stiff-necked, to pardon his Chief Minister. But for the two nights and two days during which Dhairya-Sila had watched and waited on the tower, he could neither eat nor sleep.

On the third day he would see no one, and gave orders that none should be admitted to his presence. Standing at the big window, he stared at the distant outline of the tower, and wished that he had never been born.

Then a low tap at the door made him call out angrily, "I will see no one. Any who disobeys me shall lose his ears."

"But, Sire," said Dhairya-Sila pleasantly, as he

came in boldly through the door, "pray leave me mine, for indeed I have great need of them in your service."

With a cry, the Raja rushed forward and embraced his Chief Minister. "How I have missed you! every minute I have missed you," he said, and then, "But however did you escape from the top of the tower? Who helped you?"

"A beetle, your Majesty," replied Dhairya-Sila, and then added, smiling gently, "a beetle and a drop of honey."

XIV

The Hare in the Moon

ONCE, the great Buddha came to earth in the shape of a little hare and, like other hares, made his form in the soft grass of the jungle. Then, from all the wild creatures there, he chose two friends—a monkey, and an otter.

Now the hare—as befitted his divine birth—was a devout being, keeping every holy day with prayer and fasting. This caused the monkey and the otter great surprise, for to them every day was just like any other. So they could not understand why the hare, however hungry, would eat nothing, nor join in their play, but would slip away instead into the quiet darkness of his form and make no sound.

"I shall ask the hare what all this means," said the monkey, and the otter agreed that it might be just as well to know.

So when the three friends met again, the monkey said, "Dear little hare, the otter and I both notice that on certain days you will eat no food, and also that you go away by yourself, as if tired of our company. Of course, we know that you are different from all other forest creatures, but because we have grown to love you, we would like to know why sometimes you seem to shun us."

The hare looked at his two friends, as if trying to put into words what he wanted to say, and then replied, "It is quite true that on some days which are holy to me, I fast and pass the time in prayer. I am sorry if this has made you think that I am weary of your good company. But I have some memory to make me act as I do. Ah, what joy it would give me if you both would keep the holy days as I do, praying for grace by which to live the good life, and giving such alms as you possess to the poor and needy."

"But what have I to give?" cried the otter. "I never catch more fish than is enough for my own day's food."

"Could you not spare that?" began the hare; but the otter broke in, "I, myself, should go hungry."

"Someone would be fed," said the hare, simply.

"But so small a gift—who would accept it?" asked the otter.

"Everything is acceptable if offered in the right spirit," replied the hare.

"I live on fruit and nuts," put in the monkey, "now who would want those?"

"My friends," said the hare, "it is the wish to give, rather than the value of the gift itself, which pleases the gods."

The otter sighed. "Indeed we are but poor ignorant creatures, but even so we feel, dear hare, that you are wise and good. If you will tell us when a holy day comes, I will offer my catch of fish to the first beggar I meet. But you must first teach me how to pray."

"That I will do gladly," cried the hare.

And the monkey said, "I shall seek the ripest fruit and sweetest nuts, then listen for the tap of the blind

hermit's stick. I will give him all. And on that day, too, if it be a holy one, I will not swing for joy among the branches, nor leap from tree to tree. I will not call out to my monkey friends, nor chatter with my kinsfolk. Instead I will bow my head and pray. But you, dear hare, must teach me what to pray for."

Much pleased, the hare asked the monkey and the otter to follow him, "For," said he, "down by the stream there runs a path which leads to a small shrine. On holy days the hermit may pass that way, carrying his pilgrim's staff and begging bowl. 'Alms, give me alms!' he will cry. Then we may fill his bowl, rejoicing if he finds our gifts suited to this need."

"I feel so kind, I'll give him two day's fish—" began the otter; but the hare rebuked him gently, "Feel nothing, friend. Just give."

"Without knowing why?" asked the monkey, in surprise.

"I think so," replied the hare.

"It seems strange," said the otter, "but, hare, you are so wise. Perhaps the wisest of all creatures. So I will do my best to give my all without saying to myself how charitable I am."

"And so will I," broke in the monkey; "although I still can't see what all this means, or where it leads to."

"Can you see that path which passes along the bank of the stream?" asked the hare.

"Yes, I can see *that*," replied the monkey.

"Where does it lead?" continued the hare.

The monkey peered into the shadow of the jungle. "Now that I do not know, for the path is lost among the bushes."

"You told us," said the otter, "that it led to some small holy shrine."

"And so it does," agreed the hare; "so will your path of virtue lead on to something better than anything you see. But ask me no more, dear friends, for indeed I cannot give you all the reasons why we should be good. Go, otter, catch your fish; and you, monkey, search for the fruits and nuts you prize. Tomorrow we must test ourselves by fasting, so that the poor but holy man may eat."

Still puzzled, the monkey and the otter went about their hunting, while the hare stretched himself upon the grass to meditate. Then, suddenly, the thought came to him that if he was asked for alms, he had nothing to offer. His own food was grass. Shame fell upon him, and he mourned to himself:

"What shall I do? What shall I do if I am asked for alms? Otter can give fish, monkey—fruits and nuts. But what use is grass to a hungry man? Yet it is all I have to offer, unless—unless—I give myself!" He sprang up, quivering all over with the splendour of his idea. "Myself, that can I give, and will!"

Now, whenever a good action is done, the throne of the god Sakra grows hot in Heaven. So when the hare decided to offer himself in sacrifice Sakra felt his throne glow beneath him, and said, "Something austere and beautiful has happened!"

Gazing down upon the earth, he saw the hare crouching among the soft grass of the jungle, and the thoughts of the little creature were as clear as daylight.

Descending from his throne, Sakra cried out in amazement, "Can this thing be? Is one of the smallest

and most timid of created beings capable of such a sacrifice? I will go down to earth and test the hare."

The god then disguised himself as a religious beggar. Very old, and very poor he looked, his begging bowl held out before him, his staff tapping the ground of the path he could not see.

The monkey, hearing the sound, swung down from the tree when he was waiting, and cried out, "Here he comes, here he comes! Now I can offer my alms of fruit and nuts. Holy man, holy man, accept these, my poor gifts."

"Heaven bless you! Tomorrow, when I return this way, I will accept your alms," was the reply. And Sakra went on until he met the otter carrying his catch of fish.

Bowing his head, the otter murmured, "Take—if you find it worthy—my catch of fish."

"May heaven bless you for your charity, but keep the gift until I return," said the god, and went on his way until he came to the place where the hare was waiting for the sound of a blind man's stick.

The hare did not wait to be asked, but springing up, cried joyously, "Today I will give alms such as I have never offered before. If you, holy man, can bring me wood to build a fire, then kindle it, and when all is ready I shall be ready, too."

Then Sakra fetched wood, and piling faggot upon faggot, he kindled such a fire that its flames rose high towards the blue sky. And when it was ready, and glowing red throughout, he called the hare.

"See, I have made a great fire," he said, "but for what purpose you have not yet told me."

"You sought alms," replied the hare; "I had

The hare did not wait to be asked. . . .

nothing but the grass—which is my food—to offer you, or my own body."

And with a cry of joy, the hare leapt into the heart of the fire. But instead of burning him, it was cold as ice, and in despair that his alms had not been accepted, he shed tears of shame.

"Holy man," he said, "why have you refused my gift?"

Then the god Sakra threw off his disguise and appeared in all his glory.

"I am no beggar," he declared, "but the god, Sakra. Up in my heaven I heard you offer yourself because you had nothing else. The gift seemed too great, and so I came down to test you."

"Ah, Sakra," reproached the hare, "What need had you to do this? Was there anyone who ever found me unwilling?"

Then the god lifted the little creature into his arms, and whispered to him lovingly, "O most wise and wonderful little hare! To the end of time your virtue shall be known to all men."

Taking a mountain as if it had been a small stone. the god squeezed it and, using the juice that gushed out as ink, he drew a picture of the hare on the moon. Then, setting the hare down upon the grass, went back to his throne in Heaven.

And that is why, they say in India, whenever the moon is at full, you can see marked clearly upon its silvery surface the outline of a hare.

XV

Sindhu

(A legend of the River Indus)

In the days before any history was written, there lived in the forest near Ayodhya a blind hermit and his wife, who was also blind. They were very poor, and might have died of hunger had it not been for the loving care of their only son Sindhu.

This boy, young, strong and beautiful, looked after his parents as tenderly as if he had been a woman. It was he who built them a little hut of leaves, neatly thatched, and sheltered from the sun by a clump of Bela trees. Every morning he went to the stream for water, or searched the woods for fruit. He swept the hut and hung it with fresh branches, and cooked the daily meal.

And with all this—such a strange occupation for a boy—he was gay and tender, and always willing to attend to his parents' lightest wants.

Often when they thought of their blindness, they would feel no regret, because Sindhu made up for everything; he was their eyes and the delight of their hearts. He had no friends except the wild animals, who were so tame with him that he might go to the stream when they were drinking, and they would not do more than raise their heads. The birds lighted on

his shoulder, and creatures as timid as the deer and the hares ran beside him on the forest tracks. He knew the call of every woodland creature and the note of every bird. His own movements were so swift and silent that only the snapping of a dry twig would mark his coming. The stealthy leopard could not move more quietly, or a snake slip through the grass with less noise than this forest boy.

He had never been to the great town, or even into the villages. He knew that a splendid King ruled over the country, for he had seen him with his nobles when they came hunting in the forest. This coming of a great company of people with their bows and spears made Sindhu very unhappy, for it meant death or cruel injury to his friends the wild animals. He could not understand how men could enjoy destroying the defenseless deer, the gentle hares, or the beautiful plumed birds.

For days after the hunt had passed by he was miserable, for in every track he found something to remind him of the King's hunting—a bird with a broken wing, or some small furry animal gasping in the long grass where it had found a hiding place. Sometimes he would carry one of these wounded creatures back to the hut, and there bathe its wound. And when the little thing was cured, he would set it free and watch it bound away, feeling that he had been able to undo just a little of the harm that the King and his company had brought upon the forest creatures.

And so the days went by, one very like another. They never seemed too long to Sindhu, and his blind parents passed the time in happy calm, all their needs attended to by this dutiful son.

For a long time the King had not come to hunt in the forest, and the birds and animals had grown quite bold—even following Sindhu to the hut and feeding out of his hand. Then one beautiful morning when the sun shone and a cool breeze made everything pleasant, Sindhu heard the sound of a horn. It made his heart beat with fear. How could he warn his dumb friends? How could they escape the hunters and the dogs?

His father, too, had heard the horn, and said, "The King comes this way."

"Yes," replied Sindhu sadly; "and, my father, I fear very much for the little animals and the birds. This will be a sad day in the forest."

"My son," said the old hermit, "this forest, and everything in it, belongs to the King."

"If it were only the lion and the tiger, or other strong fierce beasts that the King hunted, I should not mind so much," continued Sindhu, "but, my father, during the last hunt, a little deer was wounded. She was so small and yet so beautiful, and tame, too. Many a time I had fed her, and she had let me pick up her young and fondle them. When the hunters were pursuing her she ran by where I was concealed. She saw me, and looked at me with her big eyes as if to say, 'Help me! Hide me, Sindhu!' But what could I do? She ran on after a moment's pause, and a little later a great party of men and dogs crashed through the undergrowth. I kept quite still and none of them saw me—they were trying to catch the poor deer. Towards evening I went to the stream; there was a trail of blood on the track. I found my little forest friend wounded and dying. Oh, my father, I thought my heart would break! I brought water in my hands,

bathed her wounds, and moistened her poor dry mouth. . . ."

Sindhu could not go in. The deer had died, but he could not talk of that, even to his blind father.

"You love everything God has made, Sindhu, and that is well," said the hermit, "but you are only a boy who has been born and bred in the forest. The birds and the animals have been your only friends. The King is made differently. It has always seemed right to him to follow the chase. His people expect it. They would despise him if he did not ride or hunt."

"It all seems strange to me," replied the boy, quite unconvinced by his father's explanation; "if a *King* must kill weak and harmless creatures just for a day's sport, then I am glad I am not a King!"

"Do not judge so easily," said the hermit, "there are many ways of living. The King has a great name, and is much beloved by his people. He only follows custom. Once I lived in the capital, and there I learned that it takes all kinds of men to make a world."

"I will never go to the city!" cried Sindhu impetuously; "I will remain forever in the forest. Nothing could be more peaceful than this hut of leaves. If only the King would hunt somewhere else I should be happy."

All that day Sindhu remained at home. He could not bear to go out, lest he should see some of the creatures he loved, wounded or dead. The forest, generally so tranquil, was full of wild strange sounds, while the harsh blare of the hunting horns and the bark of the dogs, the cry of men, and the stampede of elephants and other wild herds, all added to the terror of the boy.

For himself he was not afraid at all. No one would hurt a little Hindu boy, or molest a holy hermit and his blind wife. Indeed, Sindhu knew that King Dasaratha was a devout man, one who respected all holy things, and who himself led a very worthy life. The boy had sometimes thought that if he ever met the King alone, he would plead for the woodland creatures. But it would be strange indeed if this happened.

The day passed very slowly; the noise of the hunt rose and fell; but at sunset the sound of the horns grew fainter. The company were leaving the forest.

Sindhu waited until moon-rise and then, taking the big water jar, placed it upon his head and set out for the stream. The jar was empty, and if his parents awakened in the night feeling thirsty, there would be nothing for them to drink. They were already asleep. Night and day were all the same to them, who lived always in darkness.

A thin mist hung about the forest, dimming the light of the moon, but if it had been the darkest of nights Sindhu could have found his way. He knew every inch of the forest by heart. and the meaning of every sound. A slight rustle as he passed told him that the ring-dove was on the alert; a sound no louder than a whisper that a monkey watched his passing. The stream was fringed by tall grass, and at one place overhung by a great mass of rock. Here it ran deep and still, but further on there were shallows and pools.

From one of these pools, into which the water trickled fresh and clear, Sindhu always filled his jar. It was hidden from the further bank by a tall clump of grass which grew well in the rich mud of the shal-

lows. He stepped lightly down to the brink, a shadowy figure in his simple forest dress, and as he stopped to fill the lotah[1] a cloud hid the moon and all was dark.

The hunting party, who had been scattered during the day, all joined each other at sunset upon the edge of the forest. The last drive was over, and the horns rang out to recall every straggler. It was then discovered that the King was missing.

Consternation filled the heart of every man present. What had happened? Who had been with the King last? No one seemed to know, except that the royal hunter was always ahead of his suite and resented too close an attendance.

Once more the horns were sounded, and search parties dispatched in all directions. It was thought that the King might have grown tired, and ridden back to the Reed Pavilion which had been erected for him just outside the forest. Twilight fell, and there was still no trace of him.

The King, having dismounted from his elephant, had followed on foot a fine deer which led him far away from his company, until, weary and almost breathless, he had looked round to find himself completely lost. All about him the jungle grew thick and high, and the track was obscured by brambles and tall grass. Unarmed, except for his bow and arrows, he stood wondering what to do, or whether any of the hunt would ever discover him. He did not know whether to push forward, or turn back, but as the idea of going on appealed the most to him, he forced his way through the undergrowth until at last he came out upon the bank of a stream.

[1] A kind of Hindu jug; generally a brass pot.

All about him the jungle grew thick and high.

It was now almost dark and, utterly weary, he fell asleep. He awoke to find that the moon had risen, and that he was damp with dew. He rose stiffly, and to stretch himself, climbed upon a rock which hung over the stream. Here he stood, thinking of many things—the quiet beauty of the stream under the moonlight, and the secrets of the forest.

Suddenly, a faint sound caught his ear—a ripple of water, no more. In a moment the King was on the alert, every instinct of the hunter uppermost in his mind. Was it the spring of a mahseer[1] in the pool behind the reeds, or a deer come down to drink?

Silently he fitted an arrow to his bow, and as he stood ready, waiting to let the arrow fly, the moon went behind a cloud and he was enveloped in total darkness. Again he heard the sound, as if the water of the pool had been very gently disturbed. It did not sound quite as if an animal was lapping, or as if a fish had risen to the surface only to dive in again with a splash. It might be that a deer had waded out a little way to drink more deeply.

Still, his strained ear was a little puzzled. No thought of a human being came into his mind. The forest was too dense; besides, who would wander in it at night, a prey to wild beasts? When next he heard the sound he would shoot, although he could see nothing. It was not the first time he had aimed by ear, and aimed true.

A moment or two passed, a third time he heard the sound, and let his arrow speed on the direction from which it came; and even as the arrow went cleaving through the air, there came the first notes of a boy's

[1] A large Indian freshwater fish.

voice singing very softly. The song stopped as quickly as it had begun, there was a faint groan and a sound as if something heavy had fallen into the pool, and with a bitter cry the King sprang blindly forward, realising that it was the arrow from his bow that had stilled the song.

Sindhu lay upon the grass, the moon shining upon his quiet face. In the shallow water his pitcher lay broken. The blood from his wound stained the rough white cotton of his robe. He was still alive, and even tried to smile as the King bent over him in an agony of grief and remorse.

Raising the boy very gently, he laid his head upon his lap, chafed the cold hands, and spoke words of which he himself scarcely knew the meaning. In a flash it was clear to him that he had mortally wounded a Brahman boy. What could be more terrible to one to whom a Brahman's curse was worse than death?

And Sindhu, the child of the forest, read all that was passing in the King's mind, and said, "What do you fear, O mighty King? You had no evil feelings towards me when you let fly the arrow from your bow. Be comforted. I do not mind death, but before I close my eyes I would ask you two things!"

"If it were my life and my kingdom, I would give them gladly," replied the King mournfully.

"What would your life or your kingdom be to me!" replied Sindhu. "No, King, I ask you but this. My parents, who are blind, live in a little hut of leaves at the end of the track which leads to this spot. I left them sleeping—to fetch water so that they might drink if they felt thirsty on awaking. If they find me absent for too long they will grieve most sadly. Will

you take care of them, dear King, and take my blessing in return for your promise?"

"I will cherish them as I would my own parents," said the King earnestly. "And what else may I do to show how great is my remorse for my sin?"

Sindhu remained silent for a few moments. He was gathering his remaining strength to crave a last boon.

"Speak," implored the King, "speak, dear boy!" For he feared that death had already sealed the young lips.

"It is only this," said Sindhu faintly; "my little friends, the harmless animals, and the birds—when you next come hunting in the forest, my King, will you spare them for my sake . . .? For—my—sake . . .?"

The last words came with difficulty, a pause for breath between each. They were the last that Sindhu ever spoke, but each one was to the sorrowing King as a command.

Picking up the body of the dead boy in his arms, he kissed the cold forehead, and then with a heavy heart bore his burden up the forest track.

It seemed to him at that moment, as if that burden would lie for ever not only in his arms but on his heart, and that at some future time he would be asked to give a life far dearer than his own for this one which he had so unwittingly taken.

XVI

How King Yudhishthira came to the Gates of Heaven with his Dog

THE King was weary; the great mountain had been hard to climb, and he was all alone except for his faithful dog, who followed close behind him.

Of all those whom he had loved, and who had set out with him from Hastinapura, not one remained. Their sins had prevented them from reaching the gates of the heavenly city of Mount Meru.

First, by the wayside, died Queen Draupadi; her fault had been too great a love for the bright Arjuna; next, Sahadeva, who admitted no equal to himself; followed by Nakula, whose admiration of his own beauty was his sin; then Arjuna, for he had boasted, "In one day I could destroy all my enemies," and he had failed; finally, Bhima, who cursed a fallen foe.

So King Yudhishthira toiled on alone. And as he went, thinking his sad thoughts, his dress of bark torn and dusty, the god Indra himself appeared in his flaming chariot and bade the King enter beside him. But the King said, "Unless my brothers and our Queen can enter heaven also, I will remain outside."

KING YUDHISHTHIRA

"I cannot enter Heaven unless my dog goes too."

Then the god replied gently, "Your brothers and the Queen Draupadi are already there."

This made the King glad, and he was about to step into Indra's flaming chariot when he remembered his faithful dog.

"O Indra!" he cried. "I cannot enter Heaven unless my dog goes too."

But to this Indra could not agree, and he asked the King to send away his dog, for it could not be allowed to pass the gates of Heaven.

"Then I will not pass them either," said the King, "for to cast off one who has loved me would be sinful."

In vain Indra pleaded that the dog was an impure animal—that even its very look would soil Heaven.

"Return then, and leave me here," said Yudhishthira, "for I have never yet broken faith with the timid or the devoted, with such as have come to me for shelter, or begged for mercy, or been too weak to protect themselves. Not for all the joys of Heaven would I leave my dog behind."

Once again Indra tried to shake the King's resolve, but Yudhishthira cried out in a firm voice, "I will not leave the dog outside the gates of Heaven!"

Then he turned to go, and there stood the dog, not in his humble earthly shape, but changed into a shining god—Dharma himself, the God of Righteousness. And now, from the hosts of Heaven, rose a great song of praise for the King who had been willing to sacrifice his chance of Heaven for the poor dumb animal who loved him.

And so at last King Yudhishthira, seated beside Indra in his chariot, entered in his mortal shape the highest Heaven.

Continued from front flap

subtle literature. Magical, full of the exotic color of a wise, oriental world, *Fairy Tales of India* will find a permanent place in the hearts of children and adults alike. Like imagination itself, they lead to enchantment.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Before her death last year, Lucia Turnbull was an authority on the folk lore of India, lecturing widely in England. With her husband, she spent many years in India, Mr. Turnbull working with the Indian Educational Service. Mrs. Turnbull also wrote *Legends of the Saints.*

Jacket design by Jeanyee Wong

For complete free catalog write to

CRITERION BOOKS, INC.

257 Fourth Avenue

New York 10, N. Y.

Other Tales of Magic and Enchantment

THE ARABIAN NIGHTS

Retold by AMABEL WILLIAMS-ELLIS

Illustrated by PAULINE DIANA BAYNES

"A distinguished edition of 28 of the tales told by Queen Shahrazad to divert a king who had vowed to Allah to behead each new queen the day after marriage . . . a priceless gift volume."—*Chicago Tribune* $4.95

THE ADVENTURES OF ULYSSES

By JACQUES LE MARCHAND *Illustrated by* ANDRÉ FRANÇOIS

Ulysses, the original adventurer, is the hero of this spectacularly conceived book, in which the classic story of Greek mythology is made as colorful as an artist's palette and as contemporary as today. A book that will delight the young of all ages. $3.95

ODYSSEUS THE WANDERER

By AUBREY DE SÉLINCOURT *Illustrated by* NORMAN MEREDITH

With a sense of high adventure, the author retells once again the fabulous story of Odysseus. "This distinguished narration of the adventures of Ulysses for those who are not yet ready for Homer himself has the flavor of the original to a remarkable degree."—*The New Yorker* $3.50

THE SHIP THAT FLEW

By HILDA LEWIS *Illustrated by* NORA LAVRIN

An antique toy ship transports the four lucky Grant children to wherever they want to go in history. The author's "knack of stimulating the imagination while supplying information should make this volume a long-term family favorite."—*New York Times Book Review* $3.50

THE ELEPHANTS OF SARGABAL

By RENÉ GUILLOT *Illustrated by* FELIX HOFFMAN

The story of a runaway slave who saved a princess and of a boy entranced into danger. "It has sunlight and serenity, battles and bloodshed. Both author and translator are to be congratulated on a book whose loveliness deserves reading aloud."—*The Horn Book* $3.25

CRITERION BOOKS, INC.
257 Fourth Avenue, New York 10, N. Y.